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CULTURE

Sue me — I'm white trash and I'm proud.

The big star at the Advance Auto Parts® Monster Jam was Rod Schmidt, driver of the legendary Grave Digger, a green behemoth that is all wheels, suspension and shocks. Schmidt, a native of Charles City, Iowa, is the Elvis of monster trucks, a man driven to drive. "I was born and bred to rip and shred," he explains to me. "You either have it or you don't."

Matt Court hosted two shows on Saturday, one on Sunday. We went to the Saturday matinee, which was preceded by a "pit party" — long lines of slightly surly looking parents with kids waiting to get photos and autographs of the drivers standing beside their mammoth vehicles, while carnay vendors carted around slushees, bags of blue cotton candy and hats shaped like Grave Digger. The show itself is an almost surreal combination of ceaseless advertising, choreographed auto-ballet and junkyard spectacle. A metal circus for the masses, a thunderdome car concert of honest-to-god garage rock.

The featured event at the Advance Auto Parts® Monster Jam was a series of timed heats in a round-robin format that involved two gargantuan trucks racing over the tops of four cars parked side by side. The drivers would position their rigs at the starting line, shut their engines down, start their engines up again with an ear-piercing growl and, on the green light, burst off the line like unleashed rhinos, hitting the first car, pitching almost vertical, and then bobbling and bouncing over the whole heap, sending a shrapnel of doors and hoods and side panels flying and basically just generally crushing the hoopties into pancakes of color-coded scrap metal. The races are over in a blink.

combination tank/demolition unit on wheels that, altogether, resembled a very angular Tyrannosaurus Rex suffering from Tourette and irritable bowel syndromes. This beast's entrance was a high-drama affair, complete with ominous John Williams-esque music, dimmed lights, and much gnashing of teeth and breathing of fire. Perhaps most impressive — and disconcerting — was the bizarrely elaborate fable of the Megasaurus, which was broadcast in dread tones over the arena's sound system. Narrated by a voice custom-built for movie trailers, the monster's story was a collision of creation myth and apocalyptic parable — the Garden of Eden meets *The Island of Doctor Moreau* meets H.P. Lovecraft, with elements of *King Kong*, *Mad Max* and *The Terminator* thrown in for good measure.

Apparently, "not so long ago on a peaceful island lived a colony of people whose lives were disrupted by animal mutations in the form of gigantic man-eating creatures." The story, which goes on and on, makes reference to such arcana as a sunken Navy transport ship, the testing of the atom bomb, radioactive fallout, genetic mutation and "1,000 feet of veins and arteries... pumping at 50 gallons per minute, his blood pressure exceeding 2,500 pounds per square inch..."

Fortunately, the Megasaurus eventually was discovered by a passing freighter and hauled back to the United States, where it was enlisted to crush... Honda Civics. In four or five slow, deliberate bites, the lumbering monster had that poor rice burner torn in half. It lay in jagged chunks on the ground, looking small and pathetic and definitely dead. During the Megasaurus's victory lap, it burped.

What would Barthes or Foucault make of such a spectacle? A cathartic discharge of

'I was born and bred to rip and shred'

Rod Schmidt, driver of the legendary Grave Digger

In the final race, the Oregon-based El Matador — a gorgeous machine with an intricately airbrushed tailgate dedicated to the memory of 9/11, the motto "We Will Never Forget" — defeated Grave Digger by a hair. Seeing as Grave Digger is the New York Yankees of monster truck jams, this was a major upset, along the lines of Arizona knocking Duke out of the NCAA tourney.

Other events, such as the four-wheeler races, were a sort of packing material wedged between the marquis event of the monster truck races — something to keep the kids busy. Despite the occasional repositioning of smashed cars, which had to remain on plywood so as not to damage the floor, things moved at a pretty good clip. Advertisements for Advance Auto Parts ran perpetually on the big, overhead screen, and the emcee kept up a rote ringside chatter to pump up the crowd — though, truth be told, the guy was about as enthusiastic as a carnival barker coked to the gills on lithium and horse tranquilizers.

The highlight of the afternoon, at least for me, was the appearance of Megasaurus, a

surplus sexual energy? Destructive excess indicating misdirected political angst? An emblematic display of the wasteful extravagance of late-capitalist culture?

Fuck if I know. It was pretty cool, though.

You know, that crowd at the Monster Jam — they weren't just *my* people. They're your people too, Eugene. Own it. I got a lot of laughs and raised eyebrows when I told my friends I was going to the Advance Auto Parts® Monster Jam. Yeah, I get it. It is sorta stupid. But so is *Wicked*, and *Cold Mountain*, and NPR's *Car Talk*, and pretending you like something just because you want to appear cultured or liberal or classy. A mullet and motorsports no more turn a person dumb and Republican than a Berkeley diploma automatically makes you smart and open-minded. Whether you cut me off in a Pontiac or a Prius, you're still an asshole.

I can't tell you how many well-heeled season ticket holders I've watched fall asleep at symphonies. One thing I know for sure about the Advance Auto Parts® Monster Jam: Ain't nobody falling asleep. **EW**

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