

Doctor Marrane's Wondrous Traveling Carnival

This magical artifact appears as an eighteen wheeler, truck-tractor rig. The trailer is weathered, but in good shape; on one side there are the words "Doctor Marrane's Wondrous Traveling Carnival" written in bright gold-red letters, with the logo of a cornucopia flanked by two ravens beneath it. Don't bother trying to paint over the logo. Or checking the tire pressure. Or filling the tank up with gas, for that matter. Why? Because it's a magic item.

Open up the back doors to the trailer, and you'll find everything that you'll need to run a sideshow carnival: tents, prefabricated wooden stalls, costumes, games, prizes, portable kitchen equipment, lights, sound equipment, and the list goes on and on. No matter what you take out, the truck never gets more than about one-third empty; people trying to keep an eye on how that works typically end up having screaming headaches until they stop trying. Putting stuff **back** is also often effectively impossible, but also irrelevant. One of the weirder things about the Wondrous Traveling Carnival is that it seems to attract the sort of people who are ready to go wandering around the countryside doing carny jobs, and those people always seem to show up with a pickup truck or converted bus or rear trailer.

The phrase 'always seems' gets used a lot in connection with the Wondrous Traveling Carnival. There's a list of venues in a notebook in the front cab, and somehow there always seems to be a site for the carnival to go. Those sites always seem to have a convenient vacant lot or two. Local suppliers can always seem to provide more or less what the carnival might need in the way of perishable goods, and the prices always seems to be about right. The gate from the various shows and fairs always seems to be enough to keep everybody fed and clothed and able to have a beer with dinner. It just always seems to work out.

So what's the catch? The catch is, weird stuff happens a lot in the vicinity of the carnival. So the catch is, everybody minds their own business and nobody asks or answers any awkward questions. It's not *bad* stuff, mind you. Nobody gets killed -- well, OK, sometimes somebody disappears, but they disappear in more of a "Justice may be delayed, but never denied" sort of way than in, say, "The Darkness has claimed another innocent life." But generally it's just **strange** stuff. Spooky, eldritch, maybe the kind of disquieting you get when you're maybe on shaky moral ground and you know it and you're worried other people know it, too? So, basically, stuff that

encourages a prudent silence. But if you can handle that sort of thing -- and some people clearly can -- it's not a bad life.

The Wondrous Traveling Carnival is hardly eternal, by the way. At some point, the mundane part of the carnival sort of somehow detaches itself from the eighteen-wheeler. Hard to say how this event occurs or what triggers it, but everybody always seems to know when it's time. So the rig always seems to end up finding itself parked in long-term parking somewhere, while the mundane carnival goes off, changes its name, and disappears from the weirdness of it all.

But eventually somebody else shows up to get the show back on the road.

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