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A History of Whimsic Alley
by Stan Goldin

Whimsic Alley has its roots in an ancient legend of a magical marketplace that randomly appears and disappears. The earliest tales date back nearly three thousand years ago. Purported visitors over the centuries have told such outlandish tales about Whimsic Alley that they were typically branded as lunatics or heretics. (It's a little known fact that the word "whimsy" was derived from tales of Whimsic Alley. Any outrageous tale became a "flight of whimsy" and its tellers were speaking "whimsically.") Sadly, of the thousands of purported visitors to Whimsic Alley, most were either executed or banished to asylums. It's suspected that many potentially credible sources were therefore reluctant to come forward. The legend, it's said, was documented in a series of volumes entitled *Tales of Whimsic Alley*, but all known copies were destroyed in a series of witch hunts.

In 1354, Sir Geoffrey Whilsey, a renowned wizard with the gift of clairvoyance, proclaimed he had visited the legendary Whimsic Alley. The experience, he said, profoundly changed his life. Because of his stature, Sir Geoffrey was not ostracized, but he was widely ridiculed nonetheless. Thereafter, he never had much credibility.

Sir Geoffrey changed his name from Whilsey to Whimsic and began boasting that he would one day build his own Whimsic Alley, a marketplace like no other—the first to cater exclusively to the magic community. To keep outsiders away, he would cast a cloaking charm on the marketplace, making it invisible to non-wizards. Then, so that wizards the world over could experience his vision, he would make Whimsic Alley nomadic. The entire marketplace would move to a new location every several years.

People took everything he said with a grain of salt. However, in 1367, some twenty years after he first proclaimed visiting the mythical marketplace, Sir Geoffrey's dream became a reality. Whimsic Alley opened in Dublin to great fanfare.

The early years were difficult. People seemed reluctant to go to a place called Whimsic Alley, since the myth of such a place had such dubious notoriety. Making matters worse, Sir Geoffrey practiced a rather rare form of magic, so his cloaking charm had inadvertently hidden the Alley from nearly everyone.

Approaching bankruptcy, Sir Geoffrey took on a partner—the renowned French cloak maker Rene Habber. With the addition of Habber’s Cloak Shop, Whimsic Alley began drawing customers. Its newfound credibility attracted other merchants as well.

Sir Geoffrey relinquished control of the marketplace to Habber. He was forced to take a back seat to this rag merchant, some twenty years his junior. Though the partnership worked well financially, Sir Geoffrey and Habber came to despise each other.

In 1389, Habber moved the nomadic marketplace from Dublin to Paris, where it prospered. Rather than celebrating his now burgeoning business, Sir Geoffrey seemed to resent Habber’s success at the helm. He was being pushed further and further into the background. He began drinking heavily, and entered an affair with Habber’s wife. When Habber learned of the affair, he challenged Sir Geoffrey to a duel in which he cast a transformation spell on Sir Geoffrey, turning him into a tree sloth. The spell, regrettably, proved irreversible and Sir Geoffrey, founder of Whimsic Alley, lived his remaining days hanging from the branch of a large sycamore tree.

As an intentional affront to Sir Geoffrey, Habber changed the name of Whimsic Alley to Rue Habber and positioned a street sign with the name directly opposite the tree that Sir Geoffrey then called home. The marketplace remained Rue Habber for eighty years until Habber’s grandson, Frederick Dasher, changed it back to Whimsic Alley in tribute to Sir Geoffrey, whom Dasher learned was his true biological grandfather.

Frederick’s son, Stanley Dasher, had a roommate at the Alsono Wizarding Academy in Brussels named Reid Axelrod, whose family owned Phoenix Wands, the world’s pre-eminent wandmaker for nearly two millennia. The Axelrod family also owned the forest from which the world’s finest wands are made. Reid promised his best friend Stanley that he would someday relocate the family business to Whimsic Alley. The opportunity came just two years later. Reid inherited the business when his father and uncle died in a freak accident and moved it to his friend’s marketplace as promised. With Phoenix Wands there, Whimsic Alley had finally arrived. It was now *the* place for the magic community to shop.

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Other prominent businesses eventually relocated to Whimsic Alley. Sue Pilcher's gourmet wizard confections merged with Roberta Bott's. Widdleshaft's Quill Shop moved there in 1780 and Danielle Esterhaven's Curio Shop sprung up in the late nineteenth century.

Over the centuries, the nomadic marketplace has been in 112 locations around the world. In 2004, with the swish of a wand, Whimsic Alley moved to its first American location in Santa Monica, California, its current location.