The Telegram at the Curb

6 beats, 72 lines, about 15 minutes. This script was generated using the more specific facts we provided as input.

01 A Paper Goes Missing

NARRATOR

New York City, 1890: the Gilded Age. Fine homes and crowded tenements share one busy city. The street smells of coal smoke and horses. Nell's brother has one telegram left to deliver—or so he thinks.

NELL PRICE

(offers one end of a mimed bundle)

Tom, hold this end. My papers are slipping!

TOM PRICE

(sets the folded telegram beside his foot)

Quick, Nell. This telegram must reach Fifth Avenue.

STREET WORKER B

(lifts a paper from his mimed bundle)

Evening paper! Big ship reaches New York!

STREET WORKERS

(offer mimed papers to passing customers)

Papers! Evening papers!

NELL PRICE

Kit, you took my customer!

STREET WORKER B

(guards his mimed bundle)

You stopped shouting. I didn't.

TOM PRICE

(reaches down and lifts an empty hand)

Take your bundle, Nell. I need my telegram.

NELL PRICE

(points at the empty ground)

It's not by your foot!

STREET WORKERS

(turn their heads toward a mimed wagon)

Mind the wheels!

TOM PRICE

(steps away from the imagined wheels)

A wagon! Nell, get onto the curb!

NELL PRICE

(searches away from the telegram)

I'm here. Where did the paper go?

TOM PRICE

(searches toward the shoe stand)

Gone. Come help me look!

02 Mud and a Clue

NARRATOR

Newsies carried bundles, called headlines, and competed for customers on busy street corners. Beside a shoe-shining stand, Nell spots Will at work.

NELL PRICE

(searches the first patch of gutter)

Will, did a folded paper blow past?

STREET WORKER A

(keeps polishing an imagined customer's boot)

I was shining boots.

TOM PRICE

(checks a second patch of gutter)

Please look. It's a telegram.

STREET WORKER A

(points near Tom's foot)

Under your shoe?

TOM PRICE

(lifts his foot and checks the final patch)

Only mud. I've searched the gutter.

NELL PRICE

(counts on her fingers)

Help me, Will. Then we can finish our school sums.

STREET WORKER A

(returns to polishing)

After this boot.

NELL PRICE

That boot gets more care than our schoolwork.

TOM PRICE

And Mother needs you home, Nell.

STREET WORKER A

(stops polishing and points toward the corner)

Wait! Kit gathered loose papers.

NELL PRICE

Then we must find Kit.

TOM PRICE

(straightens his shoulders)

First, I'll tell the office what happened.

03 Six Becomes Ten

NARRATOR

Many children sold newspapers, shined shoes, or delivered messages while also attending school or helping at home. Inside the office, the clock is near six; Tom steps up to the desk.

TOM PRICE

(opens his empty hands)

Sir, I lost a telegram.

MR. BELL

(points toward the street)

Find it. Deliver it.

NELL PRICE

We have a clue, sir.

MR. BELL

(points to Tom)

Good. You're working until ten.

TOM PRICE

(stops with one foot ready to leave)

Ten? You said six this morning.

MR. BELL

Plans changed. Another boy's sick.

NELL PRICE

(holds out her hand toward Tom)

But we must go home!

MR. BELL

(turns toward his other office work)

Not Tom. I need him.

TOM PRICE

Mother won't know where I am.

NELL PRICE

I'll tell her after we find Kit.

TOM PRICE

(points toward their meeting place)

Meet me where I dropped it.

NELL PRICE

(turns toward Kit's corner)

I will. Keep looking there.

04 The Price of a Corner

NARRATOR

Telegraph messenger boys could work late into the night, with shifts changed on short notice. Across the street, Kit is packing up his unsold papers.

NELL PRICE

(points toward Kit's folded paper)

Kit, Tom lost a telegram.

STREET WORKER B

(holds up the telegram)

This folded thing?

NELL PRICE

(holds out an empty hand)

Yes! Give it here.

STREET WORKER B

(checks the folded paper)

It says Tom? I can't see his name.

NELL PRICE

He carries messages. That one's his delivery.

STREET WORKER B

(holds the telegram close)

Then Tom can claim it.

NELL PRICE

(points toward Tom's meeting place)

He's looking across the street. Come with me.

STREET WORKER B

(plants his feet)

And lose my corner? My papers aren't sold.

STREET WORKERS

(lift their shrinking mime bundles)

Last chance! Evening papers!

NELL PRICE

(points back toward her better selling place)

Take my corner tomorrow. Just come now.

STREET WORKER B

(loosens his guarded stance)

Your good corner? All right. I'll carry it.

NELL PRICE

(turns with Kit toward the crossing)

Then stay beside me, Kit.

05 Wait for the Wheels

NARRATOR

The lamps glow through the street dust. Across the road, Tom searches the gutter as a horse-drawn wagon rolls between him and Nell.

NELL PRICE

(points to the telegram)

Tom! Kit has it!

TOM PRICE

(raises both empty palms)

Nell, wait! That wagon's turning.

STREET WORKERS

(hold out warning palms)

Stay on the curb!

STREET WORKER B

(holds the folded paper where Tom can see)

This telegram, Tom?

TOM PRICE

Yes! Don't let it fall.

NELL PRICE

(leans forward but keeps both feet planted)

I'll run across.

STREET WORKER B

(raises a warning hand without touching Nell)

No! A paper isn't worth that.

NELL PRICE

(looks toward Tom)

But you're working until ten!

TOM PRICE
(holds Nell's gaze)
I'd rather work than see you hurt.

STREET WORKERS
(check both ways before lowering their hands)
The road is clear!

NELL PRICE
(walks slowly beside Kit)
Walk with us, Kit.

TOM PRICE
(takes the telegram with both hands)
Thank you. I'll take it from here.

06 A Crust for Later

NARRATOR
Tom delivers the telegram to Mrs. Reed on Fifth Avenue, then returns to the office. Nell reaches the desk with him as the clock strikes six.

MR. BELL
(holds out a questioning palm)
Was it delivered?

TOM PRICE
(steps toward the imagined office desk)
Yes, sir. Mrs. Reed has it.

MR. BELL
(points toward the messenger waiting place)
Good. Now stay until ten.

NELL PRICE
Even after all that?

TOM PRICE
(turns toward Nell)
Yes. But you must get home.

NELL PRICE
Not while Mother thinks you're lost.

STREET WORKER A
(looks from Nell to Tom)
Nell! Did you find him?

NELL PRICE
Yes, Will. He still can't leave.

STREET WORKER A

(holds out his hands like a food basket)

I'll bring his supper.

TOM PRICE

Please tell Mother I'll come after ten.

MR. BELL

(makes space beside the imagined desk)

Eat here when it comes.

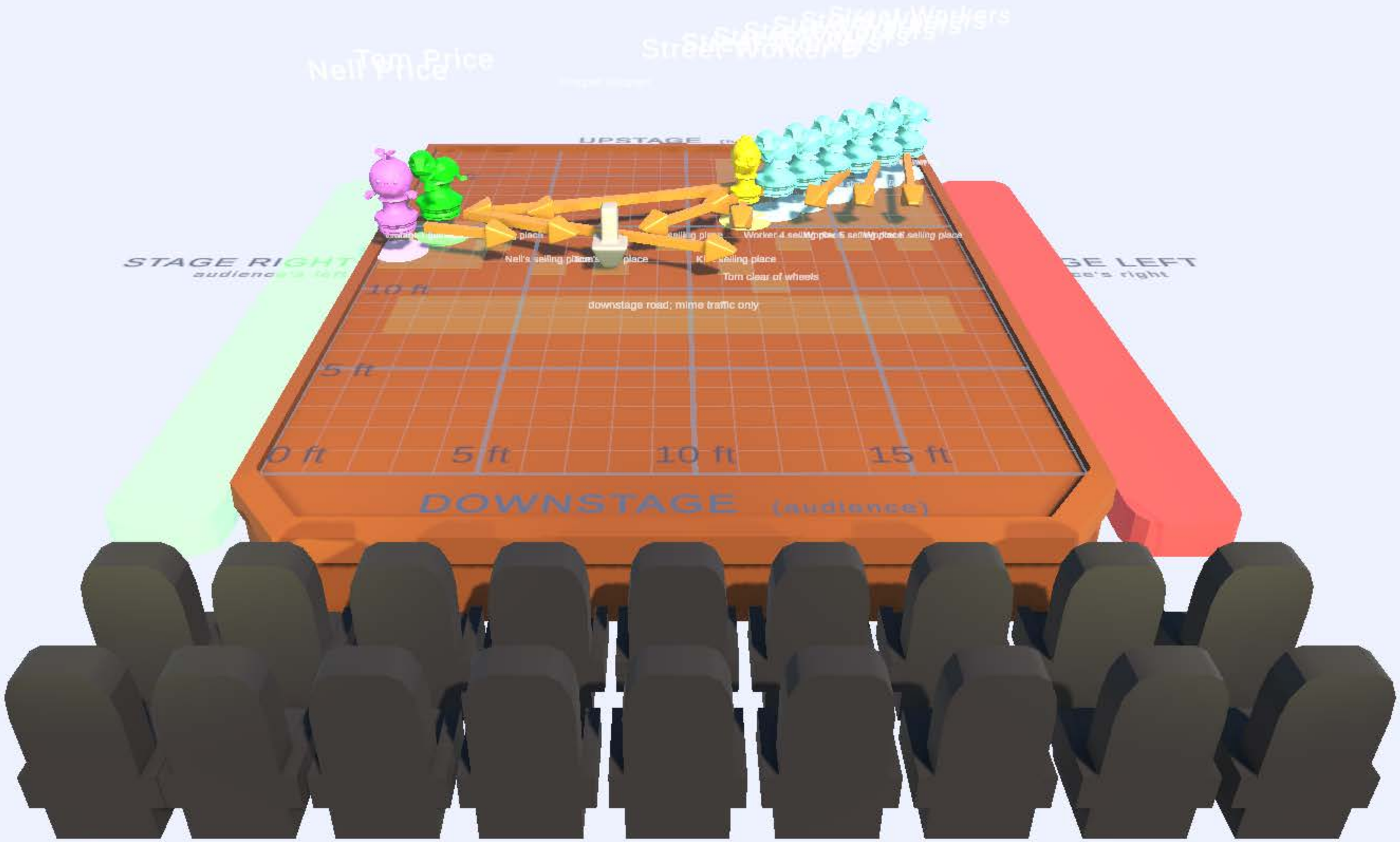
NELL PRICE

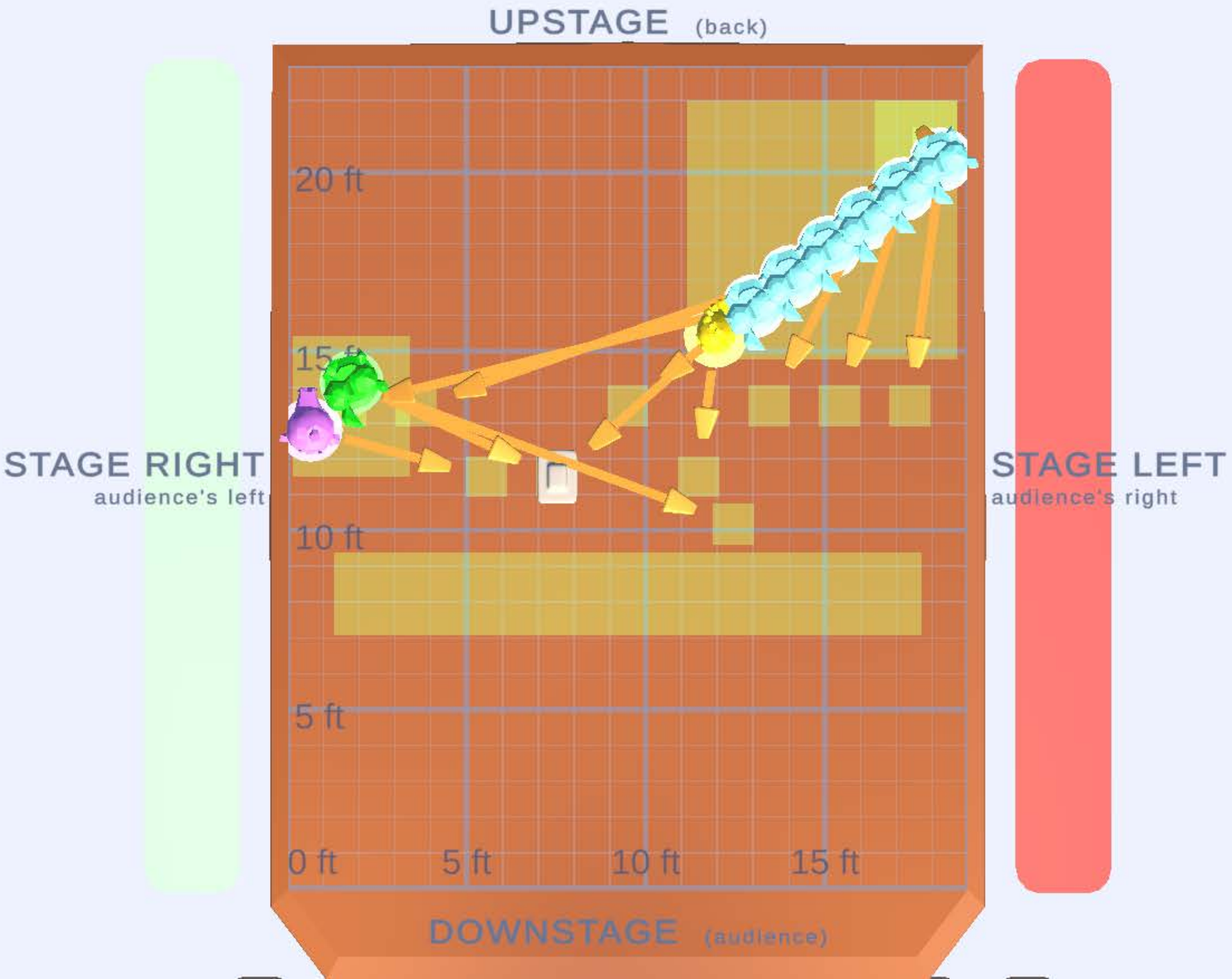
(gives Tom a small wave)

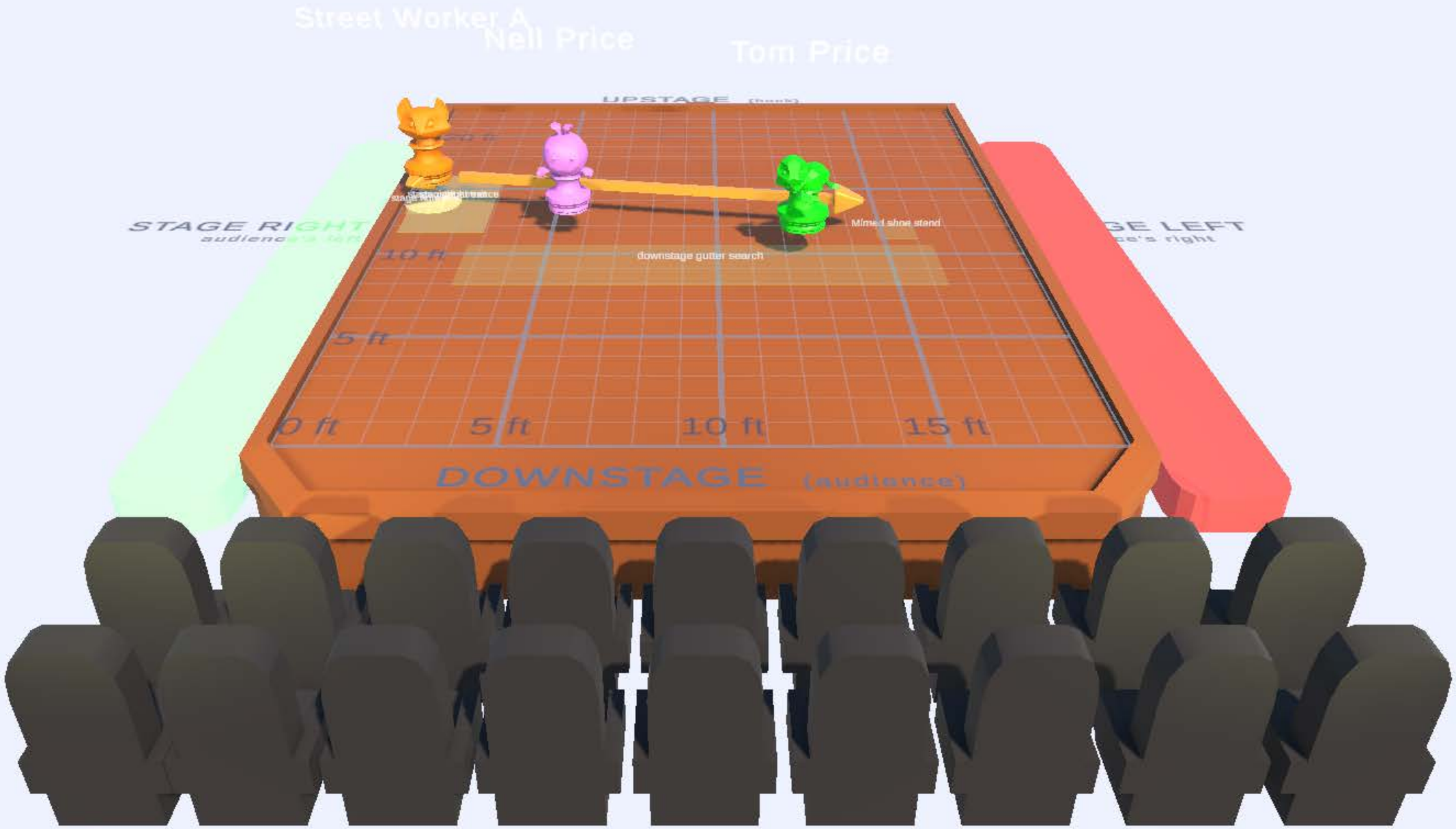
I'll tell her, Tom. Save me a crust.

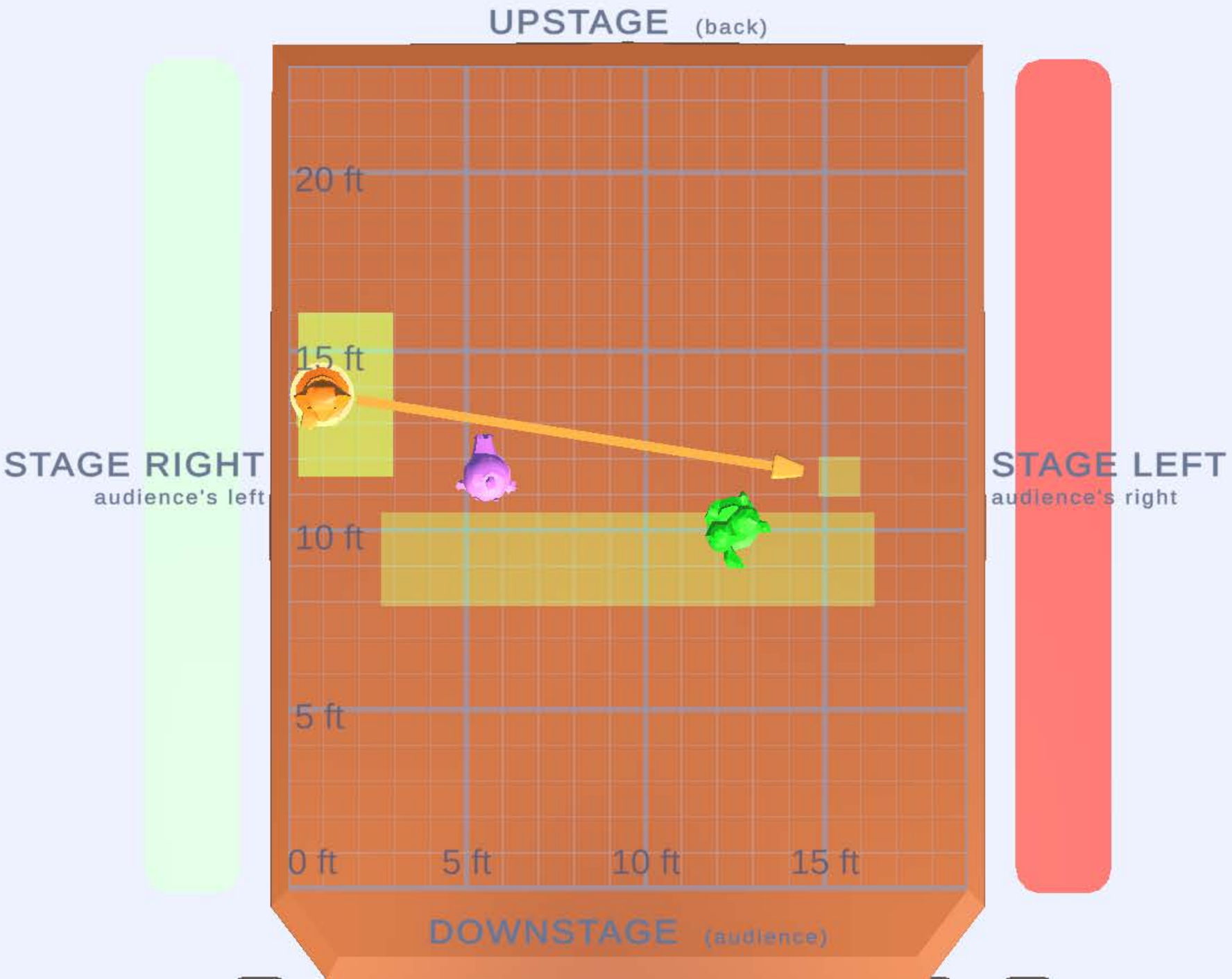
NARRATOR

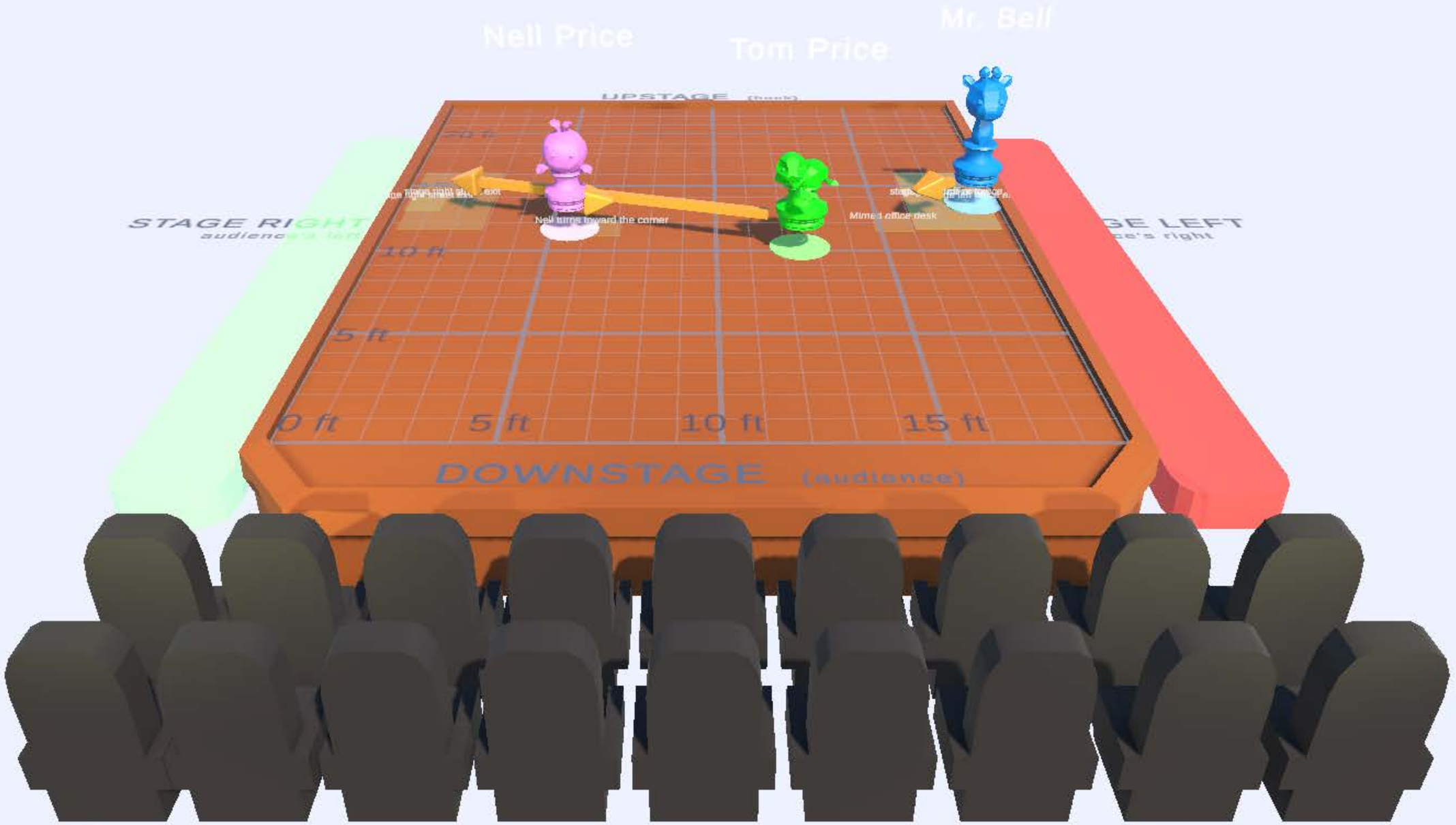
Night work goes on, but now Tom's family will know where he is. Which mattered most today: money, schoolwork, safety, or getting home?

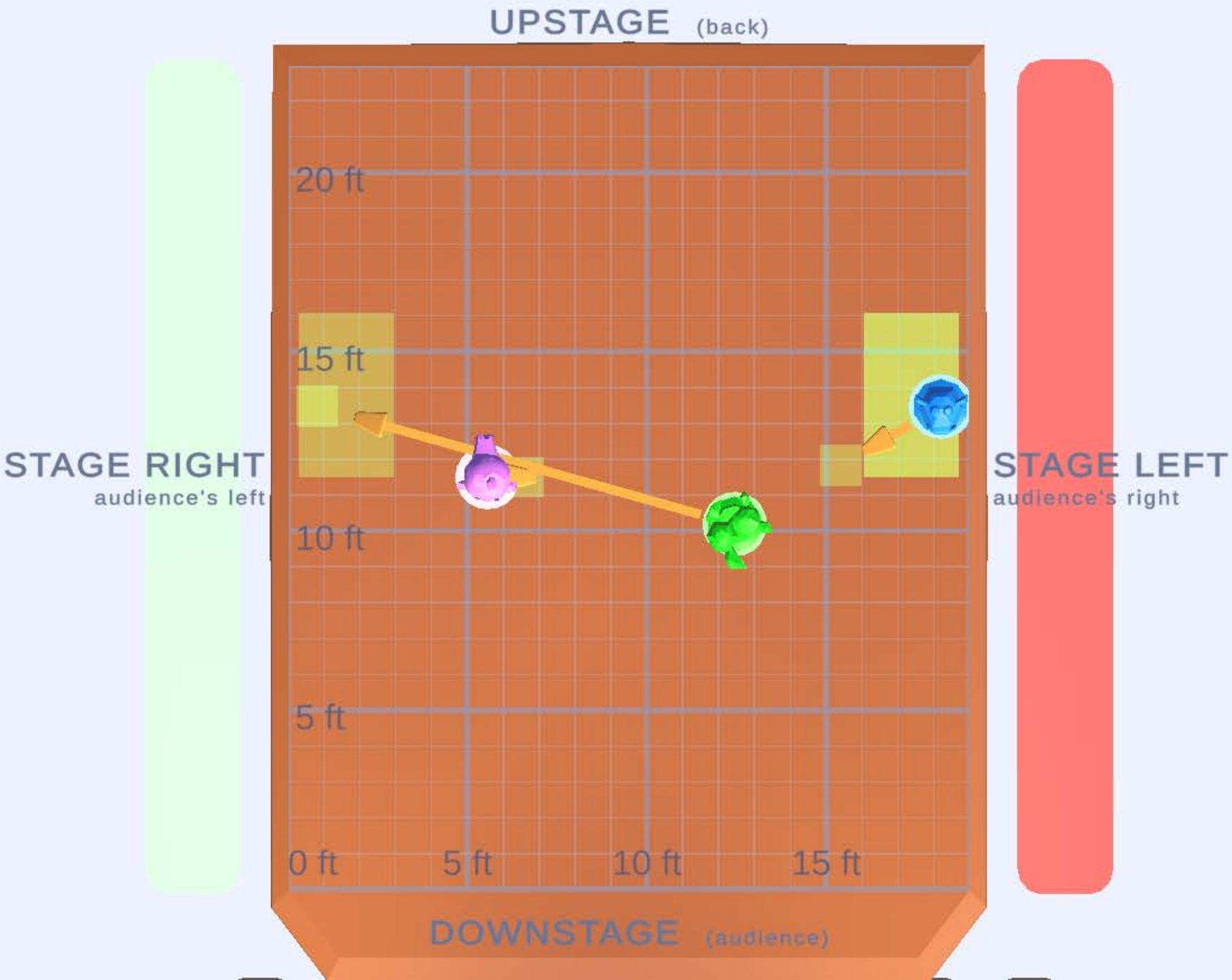

Tom Price
Nell Price
Street Workers
UPSTAGE
STAGE RIGHT
audience's left
STAGE LEFT
audience's right
Nell's selling place
Tom's selling place
Kit's selling place
Worker 4 selling place
Worker 5 selling place
Worker 6 selling place
Tom clear of wheels
downstage road; mime traffic only
10 ft
5 ft
0 ft
5 ft
10 ft
15 ft
DOWNSTAGE (audience)

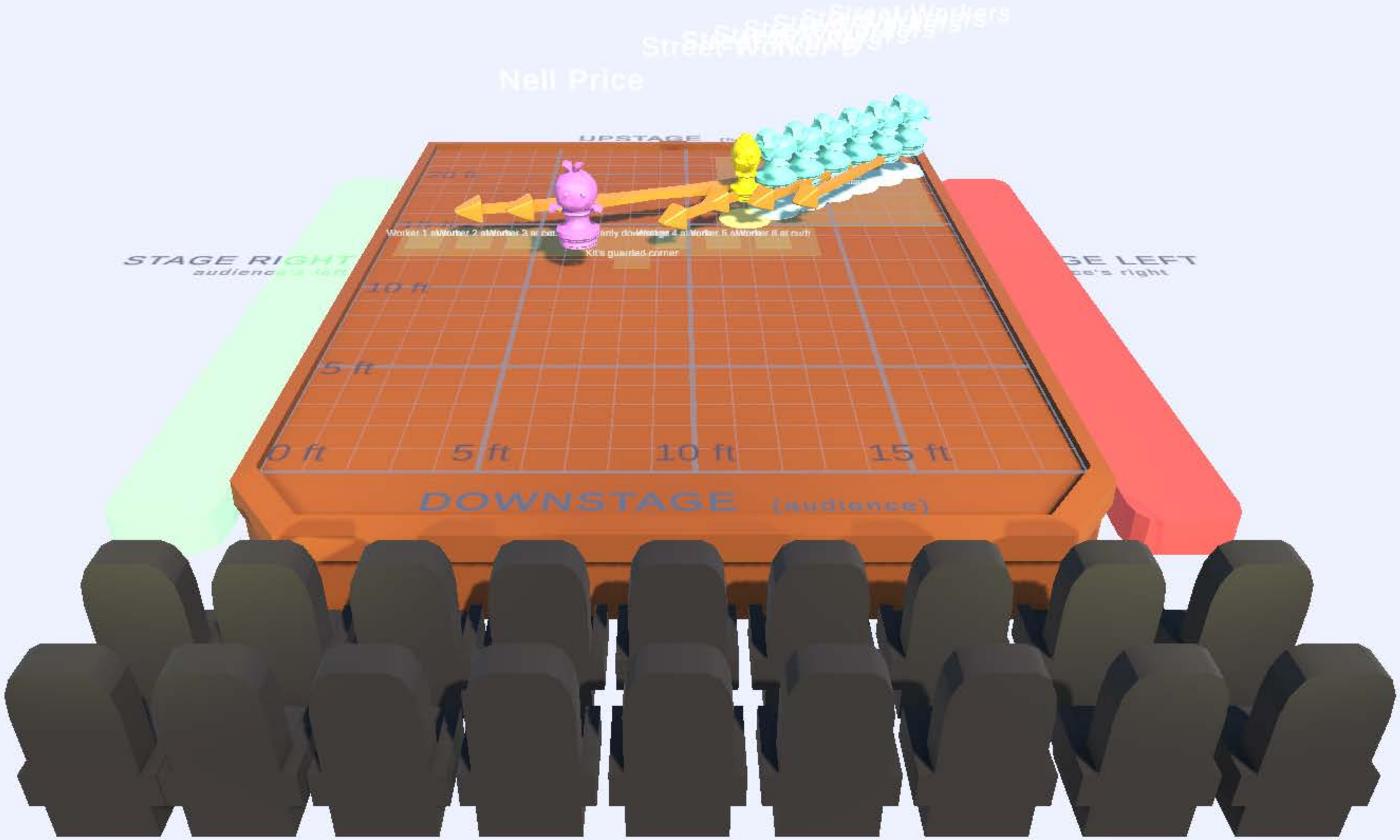

UPSTAGE (back)
20 ft
15 ft
10 ft
5 ft
0 ft
5 ft
10 ft
15 ft
STAGE RIGHT
audience's left
STAGE LEFT
audience's right
DOWNSTAGE (audience)

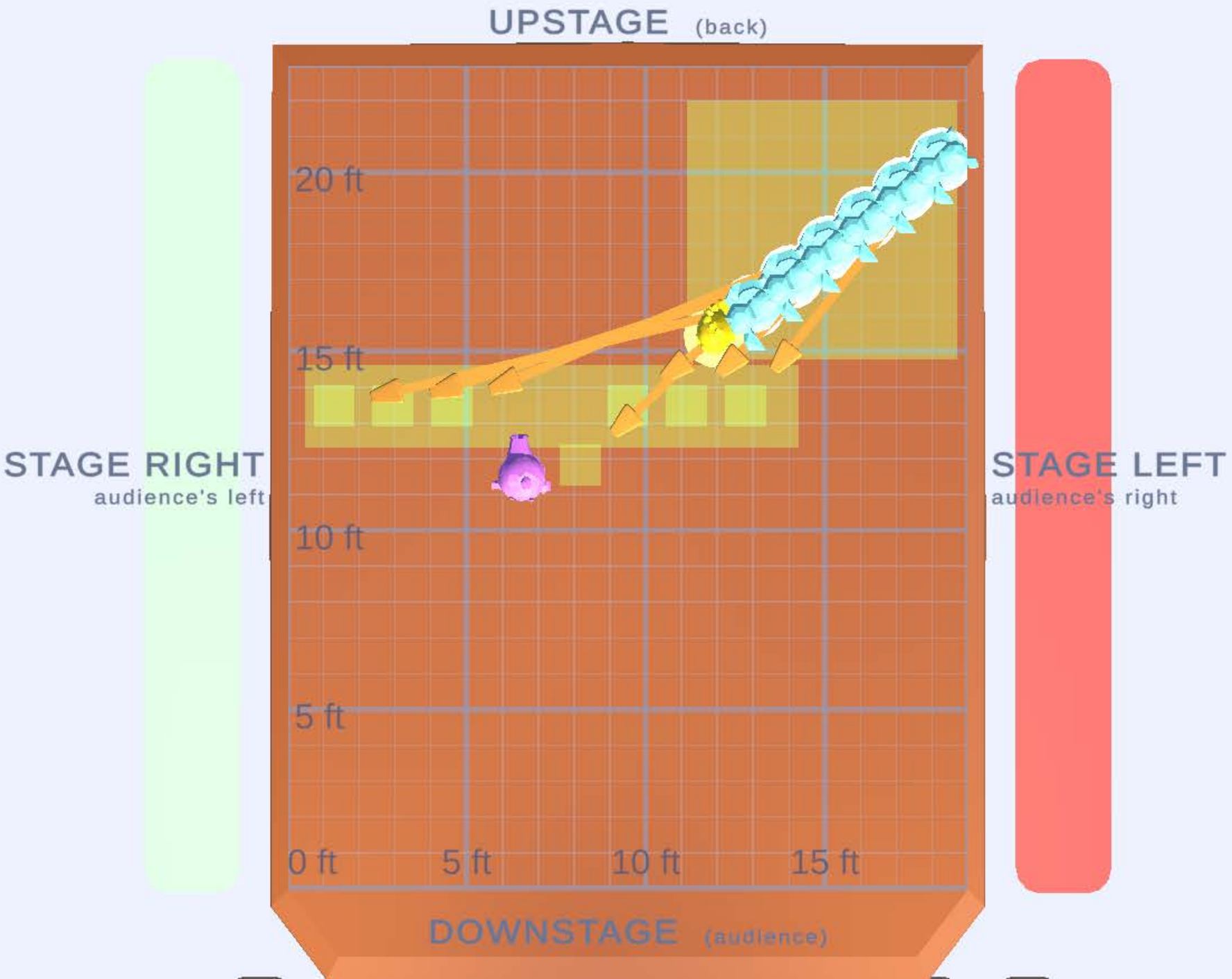

Street Worker A
Nell Price
Tom Price
UPSTAGE (back)
STAGE RIGHT
audience's left
GE LEFT
e's right
10 ft
5 ft
0 ft
5 ft
10 ft
15 ft
downstage gutter search
Mimed shoe stand
DOWNSTAGE (audience)

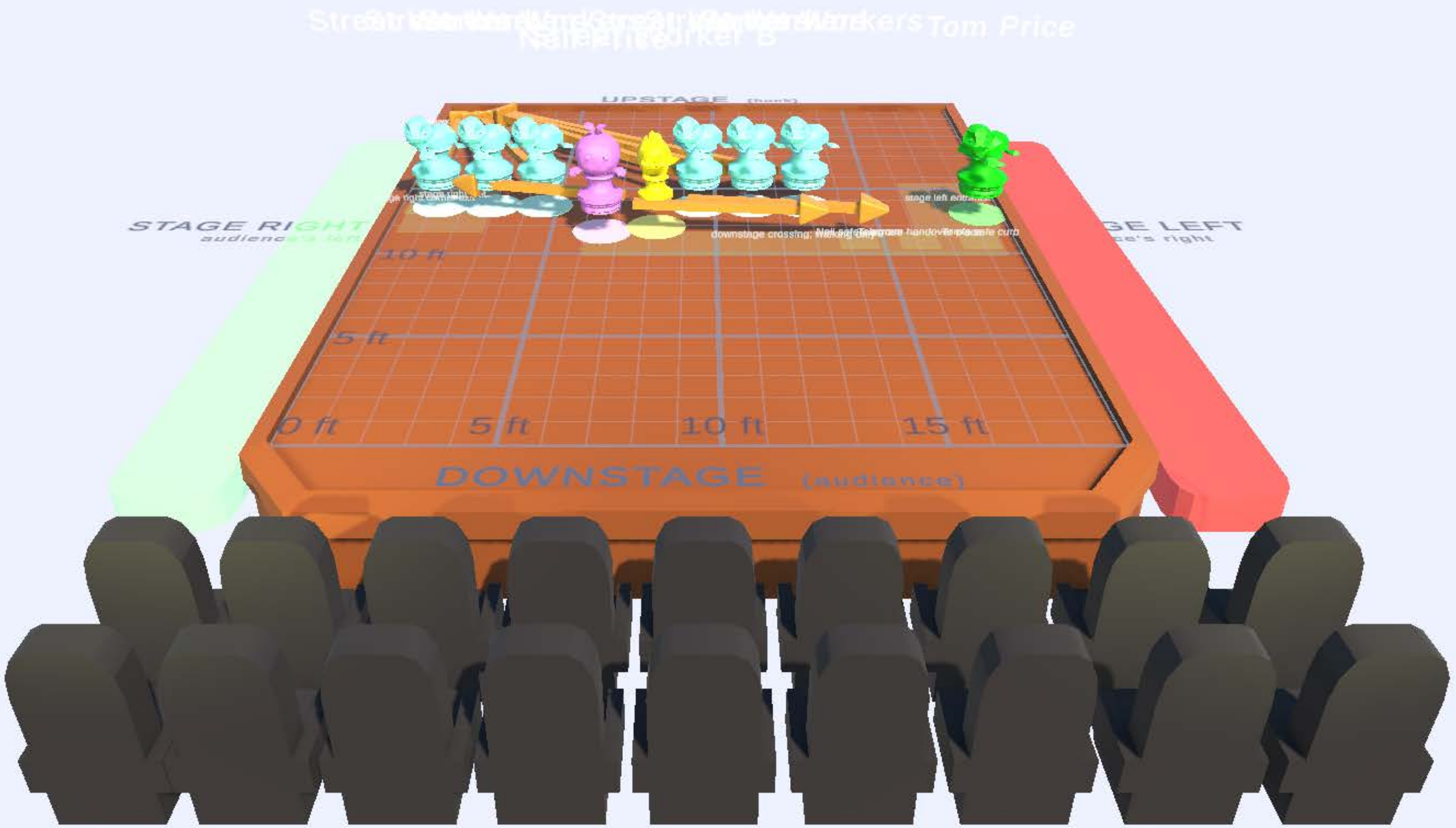

UPSTAGE (back)
20 ft
15 ft
10 ft
5 ft
0 ft
5 ft
10 ft
15 ft
STAGE RIGHT
audience's left
STAGE LEFT
audience's right
DOWNSTAGE (audience)

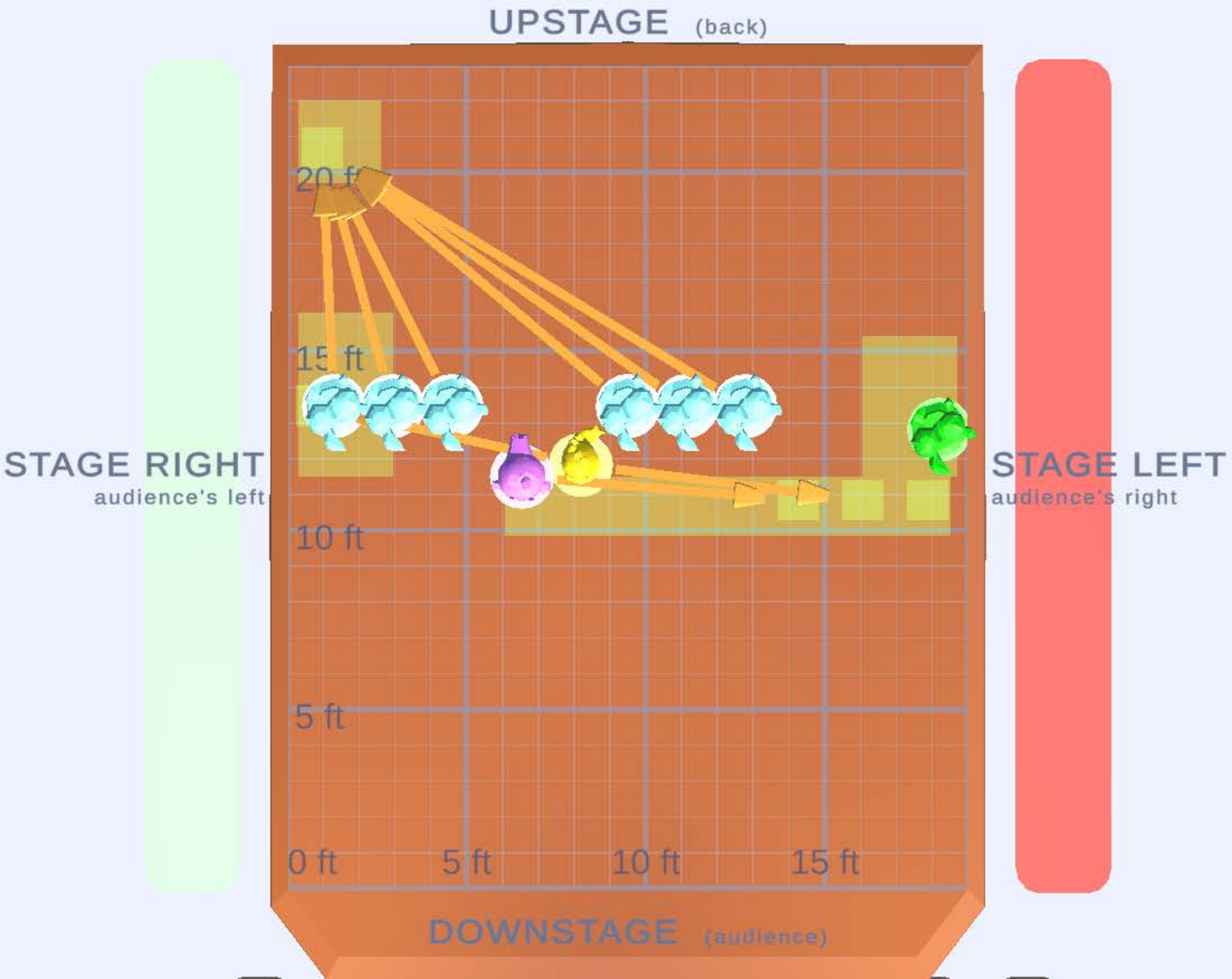

Nell Price
Tom Price
Mr. Bell
UPSTAGE (back)
STAGE RIGHT
audience's left
STAGE LEFT
audience's right
10 ft
5 ft
0 ft
5 ft
10 ft
15 ft
DOWNSTAGE (audience)
Nell turns toward the corner
Mime 1 office desk

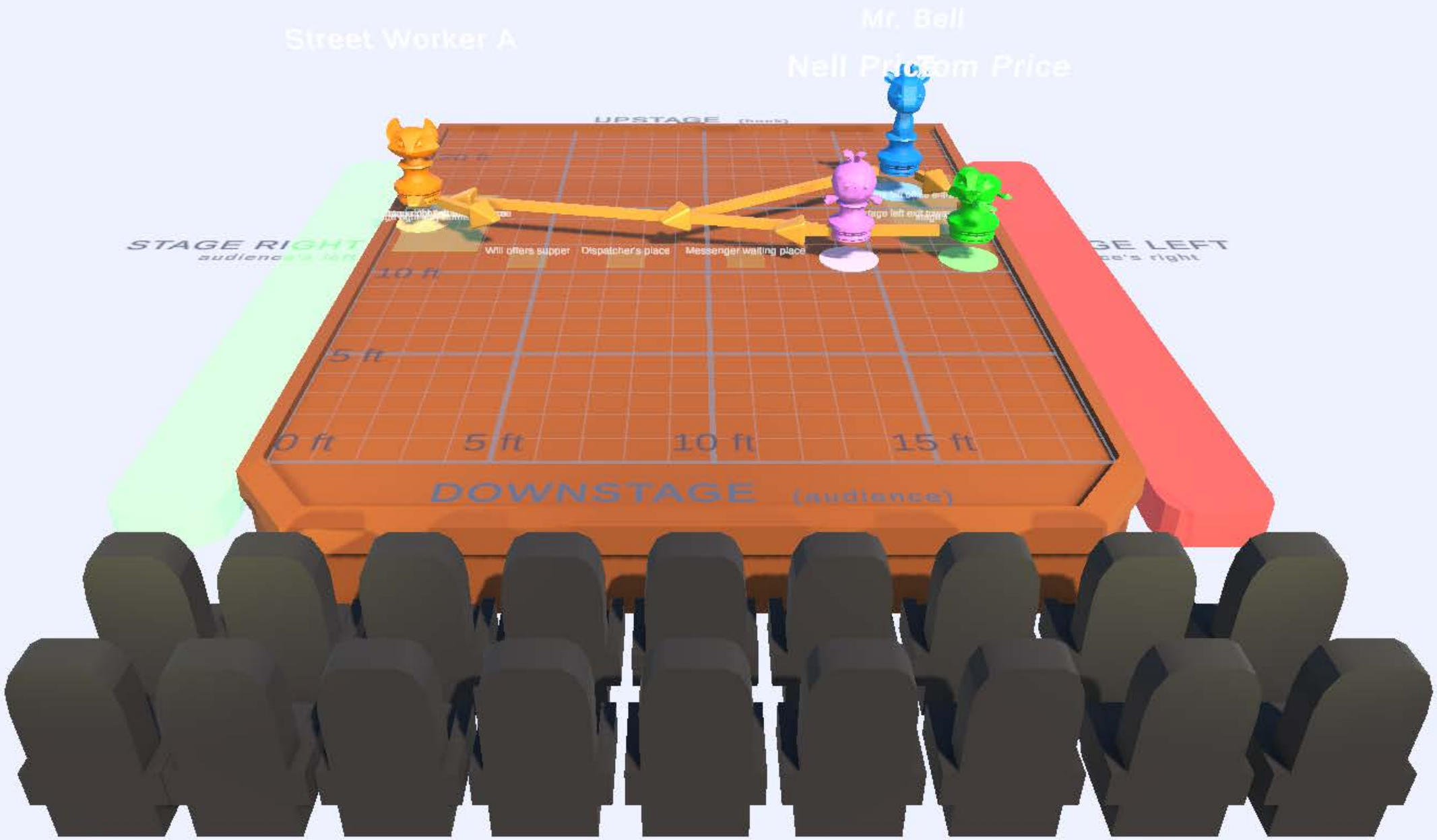

UPSTAGE (back)
20 ft
15 ft
10 ft
5 ft
0 ft
5 ft
10 ft
15 ft
DOWNSTAGE (audience)
STAGE RIGHT
audience's left
STAGE LEFT
audience's right

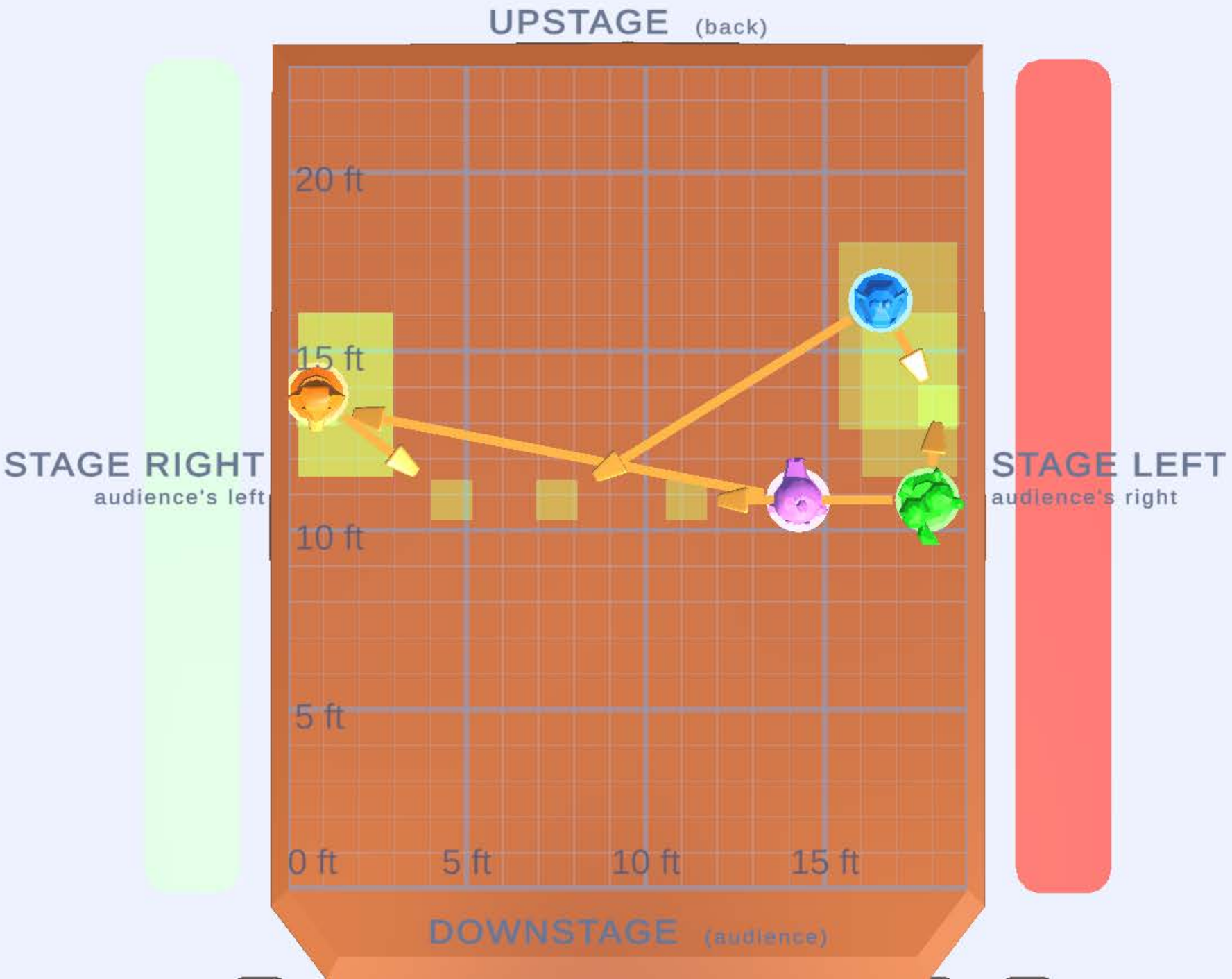

Nell Price
UPSTAGE
STAGE RIGHT
audience's left
STAGE LEFT
audience's right
10 ft
5 ft
0 ft
5 ft
10 ft
15 ft
DOWNSTAGE (audience)
Kit's guarded corner


UPSTAGE (back)
20 ft
15 ft
10 ft
5 ft
0 ft
5 ft
10 ft
15 ft
STAGE RIGHT
audience's left
STAGE LEFT
audience's right
DOWNSTAGE (audience)


UPSTAGE
STAGE RIGHT
audience's left
GE LEFT
e's right
10 ft
5 ft
0 ft
5 ft
10 ft
15 ft
DOWNSTAGE (audience)


UPSTAGE (back)
20 ft
15 ft
10 ft
5 ft
0 ft
5 ft
10 ft
15 ft
STAGE RIGHT
audience's left
STAGE LEFT
audience's right
DOWNSTAGE (audience)


Street Worker A
Mr. Bell
Nell Pr
Tom Price
UPSTAGE (back)
STAGE RIGHT
audience's left
GE LEFT
ce's right
Will offers supper
Dispatcher's place
Messenger waiting place
10 ft
5 ft
0 ft
5 ft
10 ft
15 ft
DOWNSTAGE (audience)


UPSTAGE (back)
20 ft
15 ft
10 ft
5 ft
0 ft
5 ft
10 ft
15 ft
STAGE RIGHT
audience's left
STAGE LEFT
audience's right
DOWNSTAGE (audience)