







Random  
walk



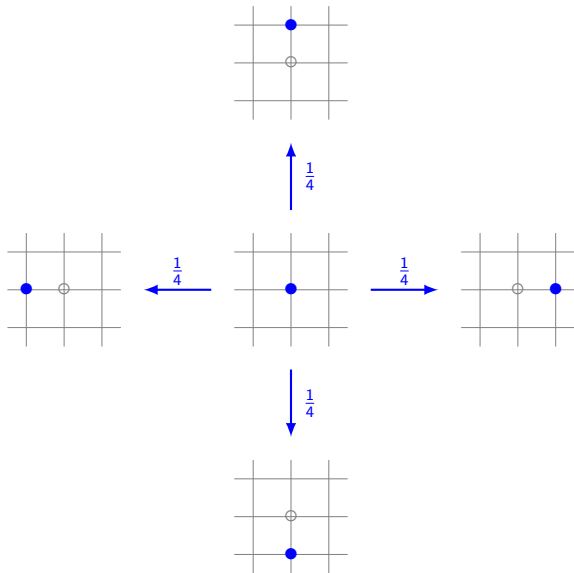
Rotor  
walk



# Simple random walk on $\mathbb{Z}^2$



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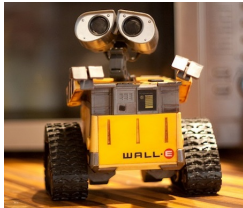
# Simple random walk on $\mathbb{Z}^2$



- Visits every site infinitely often? **Yes!**
- Scaling limit? **The standard 2-D Brownian motion:**

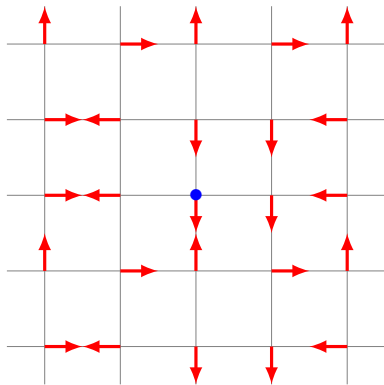
$$\left( \underbrace{\frac{1}{\sqrt{n}} X_{[nt]}}_{\text{location of the walker at time } [nt]} \right)_{t \geq 0} \xrightarrow{n \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} \underbrace{(B_1(t), B_2(t))}_{\text{independent standard Brownian motions}}_{t \geq 0}.$$

Rotor walk on  $\mathbb{Z}^2$



# Rotor walk on $\mathbb{Z}^2$

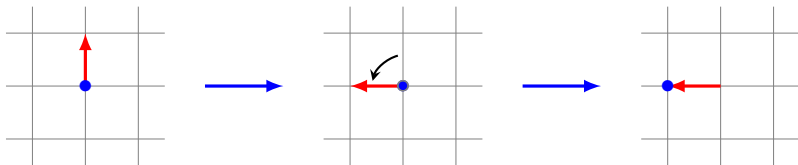
Put a **signpost** at each site.





## Rotor walk on $\mathbb{Z}^2$

Turn the signpost 90° counterclockwise, then follow the signpost.



The signpost says:

“This is the way you went the last time you were here”,  
(assuming you ever were!)





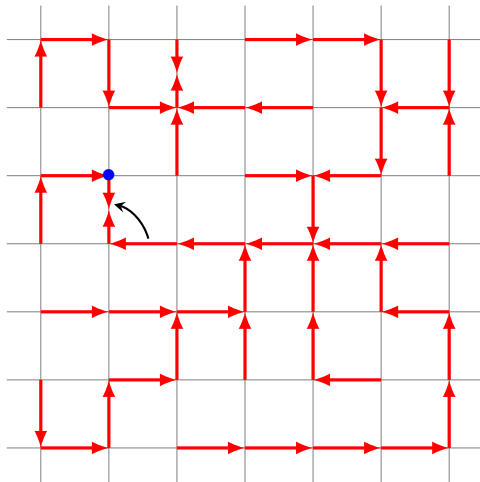






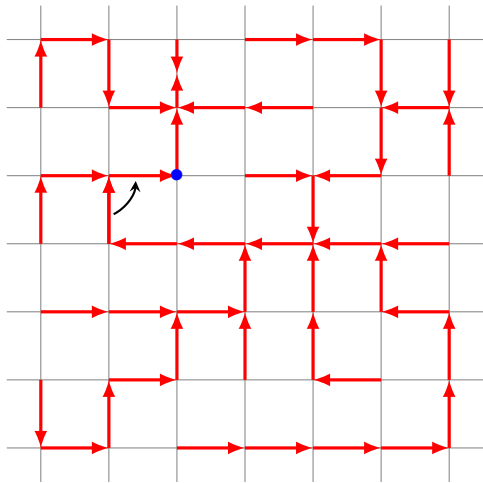
# Rotor walk on $\mathbb{Z}^2$

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## Rotor walk on $\mathbb{Z}^2$

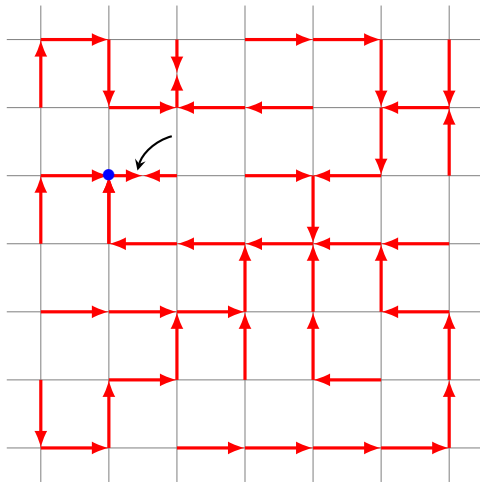
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# Rotor walk on $\mathbb{Z}^2$

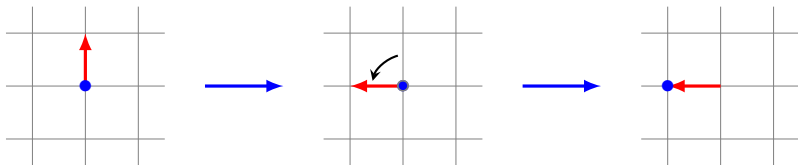
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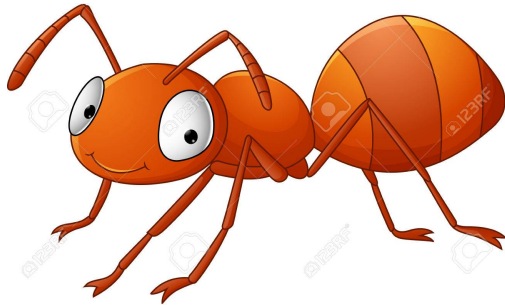
## Why rotor walk?

Randomness can be (was) expensive to simulate!



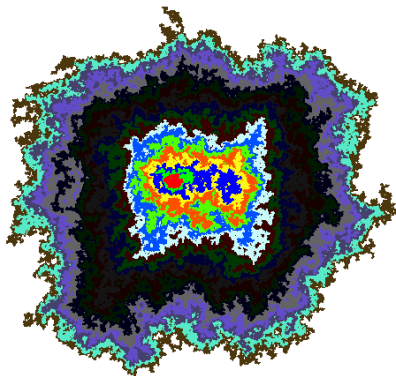
# Why rotor walk?

As a model for ants' foraging strategy.



## Why rotor walk?

As a model of self-organized criticality for statistical mechanics.



Visited sites after 80 returns to the origin (by Laura Florescu).

## Conjectures for rotor walk on $\mathbb{Z}^2$



For initial signposts i.i.d. uniform among the four directions,

- (PDDK '96) Visits every site infinitely often?
- (PDDK '96)  $\#\{X_1, \dots, X_n\}$  is  $\asymp n^{2/3}$ ?  
(compare with  $n/\log n$  for the simple random walk.)
- (Kapri-Dhar '09) The asymptotic shape of  $\{X_1, \dots, X_n\}$  is a disc?

# More randomness please!

Well  
studied

Many open  
problems



Random

Deterministic



# More randomness please!

Well studied



Let's study this!!!



Many open problems

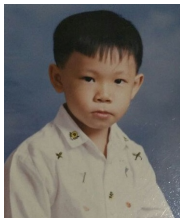


Random

Something in between

Deterministic

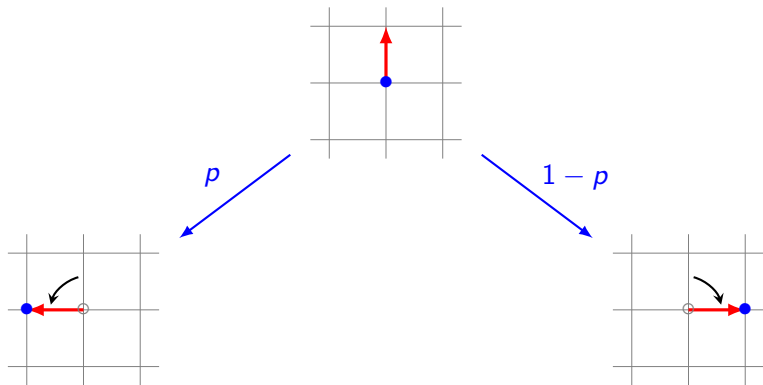
$p$ -rotor walk on  $\mathbb{Z}^2$



## $p$ -rotor walk on $\mathbb{Z}^2$

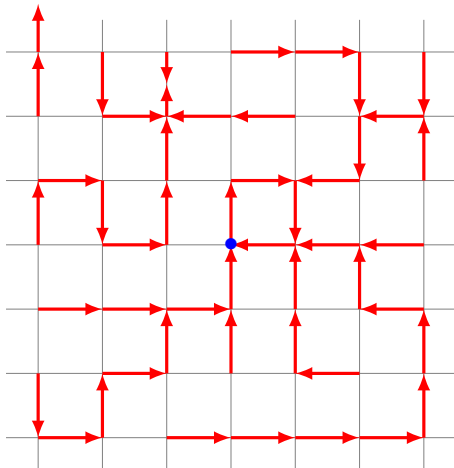
With probability  $p$ , turn the signpost  $90^\circ$  counter-clockwise.

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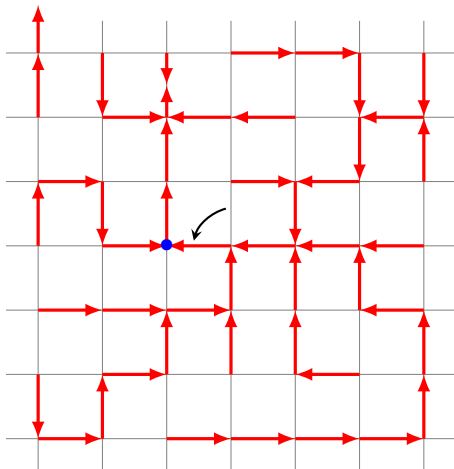
## $p$ -rotor walk on $\mathbb{Z}^2$

Follow rotor walk rule with prob.  $p$ , do the opposite with prob.  $1 - p$



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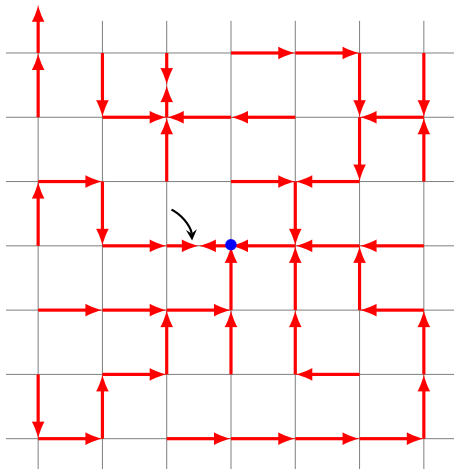
Follow rotor walk rule with prob.  $p$ , do the opposite with prob.  $1 - p$



Follow the rule.

## $p$ -rotor walk on $\mathbb{Z}^2$

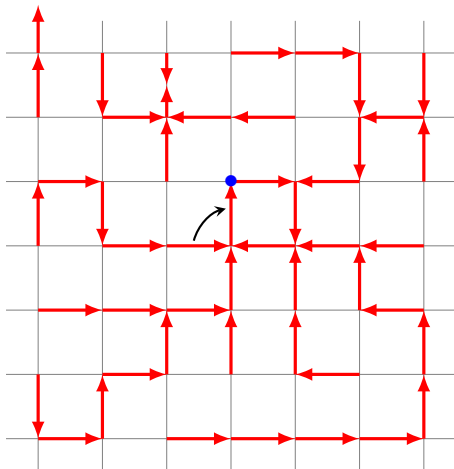
Follow rotor walk rule with prob.  $p$ , do the opposite with prob.  $1 - p$



Do the opposite.

## $p$ -rotor walk on $\mathbb{Z}^2$

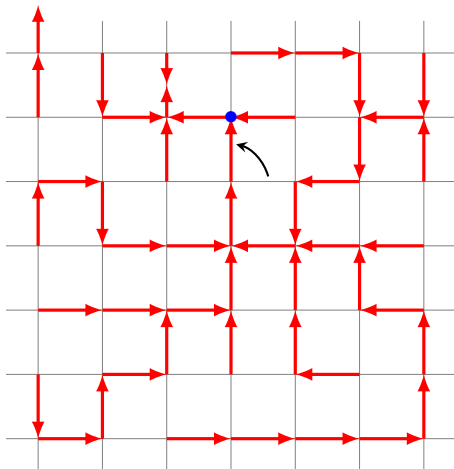
Follow rotor walk rule with prob.  $p$ , do the opposite with prob.  $1 - p$



Do the opposite again.

## $p$ -rotor walk on $\mathbb{Z}^2$

Follow rotor walk rule with prob.  $p$ , do the opposite with prob.  $1 - p$

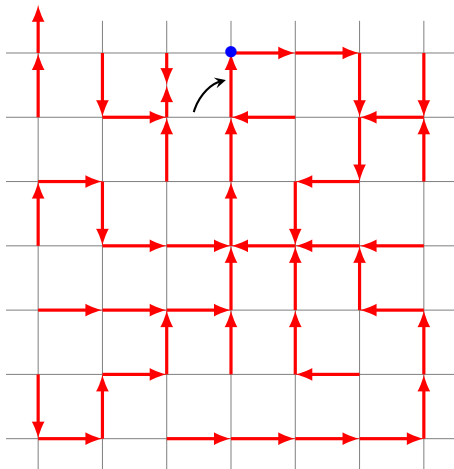


Follow the rule.



## $p$ -rotor walk on $\mathbb{Z}^2$

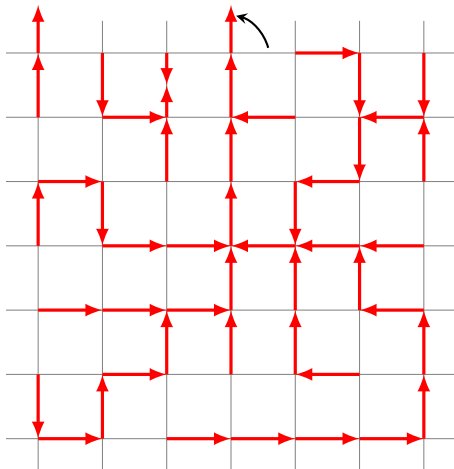
Follow rotor walk rule with prob.  $p$ , do the opposite with prob.  $1 - p$



Do the opposite.

## $p$ -rotor walk on $\mathbb{Z}^2$

Follow rotor walk rule with prob.  $p$ , do the opposite with prob.  $1 - p$

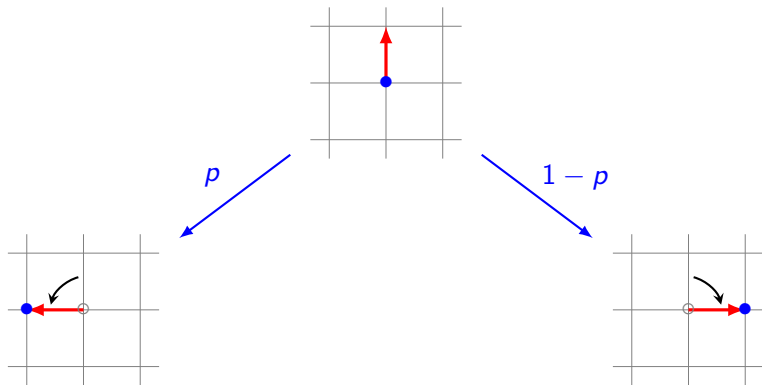


Ops...

## $p$ -rotor walk on $\mathbb{Z}^2$

With probability  $p$ , turn the signpost  $90^\circ$  counter-clockwise.

With probability  $1 - p$ , turn the signpost  $90^\circ$  clockwise.



Recover the rotor walk if  $p = 1$ .

**Recurrence result for p-rotor walk**

## Recurrence for $p$ -rotor walk on $\mathbb{Z}^2$

Theorem (C., '23)

Let  $p = \frac{1}{2}$  and let the *i.i.d uniform among four directions* be the initial signpost configuration. Then the  $p$ -rotor walk visits every vertex infinitely often almost surely.

# Proof of recurrence for the simple random walk

Consider the following martingale:

$$M(t) := \underbrace{a(X(t))}_{\text{potential kernel}} - \underbrace{N(t)}_{\text{\# of times leaving } o}.$$

Use the optional stopping theorem:

$$0 = \mathbb{E}[M(\underbrace{\tau(r)}_{\text{hitting time of } \partial B_r \cup \{o\}})] \approx \frac{2}{\pi} \ln r (1 - \underbrace{p_{\text{ret}}(r)}_{\text{prob. of return before hitting } \partial B_r}) - 1.$$

## Proof of recurrence for the simple random walk (ctd.)

We rewrite the equation to

$$\underbrace{p_{\text{ret}}(r)}_{\text{prob. of return before hitting } \partial B_r} \approx 1 - \frac{\pi}{2 \ln r},$$

and we then conclude that

$$\underbrace{p_{\text{rec}}}_{\text{recurrence probability}} = 1 - \lim_{r \rightarrow \infty} \frac{\pi}{2 \ln r} = 1.$$

## Proof of recurrence for $p$ -rotor walk

Consider the following martingale:

$$M(t) := a(X(t)) - N(t) + \underbrace{\sum_{x \in \{X_0, \dots, X_t\}} w(x; \rho_t)}_{\text{compensator}}.$$

By the same argument as before,

$$\underbrace{p_{\text{rec}}}_{\text{recurrence probability}} = 1 - \lim_{r \rightarrow \infty} \frac{\pi}{2 \ln r} \left( \sum_{|x| \leq r} \mathbb{E}[w(x; \rho_{\tau(r)})] \right).$$



## Proof of recurrence for $p$ -rotor walk (ctd.)

We can estimate the terms in the compensator **locally** by

$$|\mathbb{E}[w(x; \rho_{\tau(r)})]| \leq \left(1 - \frac{1}{2^{70}}\right) \frac{2}{\pi|x|^2}.$$

Plugging this estimate into previous equation,

$$p_{\text{rec}} \geq 1 - \lim_{r \rightarrow \infty} \frac{\pi}{2 \ln r} \left( \sum_{|x| \leq r} \left(1 - \frac{1}{2^{70}}\right) \frac{2}{\pi|x|^2} \right) = \frac{1}{2^{70}} > 0.$$

By **Kolmogorov zero-one law**, the recurrence probability is 1.

So we have proved ...

Theorem (C., '23)

Let  $p = \frac{1}{2}$  and let the *i.i.d uniform among four directions* be the initial signpost configuration. Then the  $p$ -rotor walk visits every vertex infinitely often almost surely.

A stylized, red, 3D-effect graphic of the word "Eureka!" with a jagged, starburst-like border around it, indicating a moment of discovery or triumph.

# Open problem

## Conjecture

Let  $p \neq \frac{1}{2}$ . Prove that  $p$ -rotor walk with i.i.d. uniform signpost configuration is *recurrent*.

Obstacle: Need a *good estimate* for the compensator.

$$\underbrace{M(t)}_{\text{martingale}} := a(X(t)) - N(t) + \underbrace{\sum_{x \in \{X_0, \dots, X_t\}} w(x; \rho_t)}_{\text{compensator}}.$$

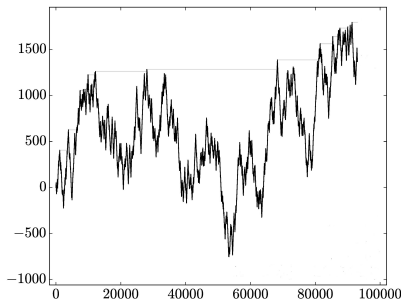


**Scaling limit result for p-rotor walk**

## Scaling limit for $p$ -rotor walk on $\mathbb{Z}$

(Huss, Levine, Sava-Huss 18) The scaling limit for  $p$ -rotor walk on  $\mathbb{Z}$  is a **perturbed Brownian motion**  $(Y(t))_{t \geq 0}$ ,

$$Y(t) = \underbrace{B(t)}_{\text{standard Brownian motion}} + a \underbrace{\sup_{0 \leq s \leq t} Y(s)}_{\text{perturbation at maximum}} + b \underbrace{\inf_{0 \leq s \leq t} Y(s)}_{\text{perturbation at minimum}}, \quad t \geq 0.$$



$Y(t)$  for  $a = -0.998$ , and  $b = 0$  (by Wilfried Huss).

## Scaling limit for $p$ -rotor walk on $\mathbb{Z}^2$

Question: Is the scaling limit for  $p$ -rotor walk on  $\mathbb{Z}^2$  a “2-D perturbed Brownian motion”?

Problem: How to define “2-D perturbed Brownian motion”?

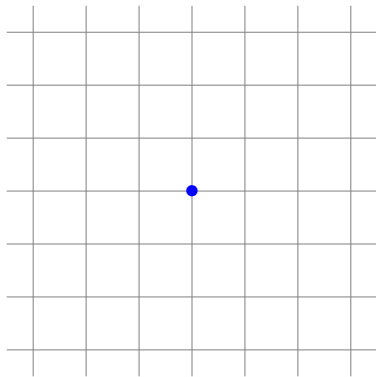
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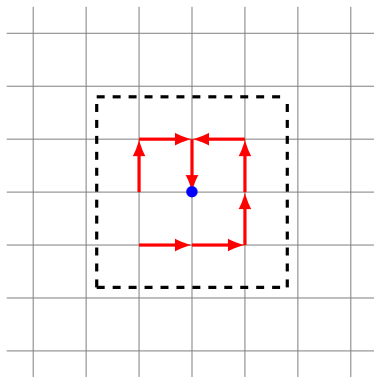
Conjecture: The scaling limit for  $p$ -rotor walk on  $\mathbb{Z}^2$  when  $p = \frac{1}{2}$  is the standard 2-D Brownian motion.

# Uniform spanning forest plus one edge ( $\text{USF}^+$ )



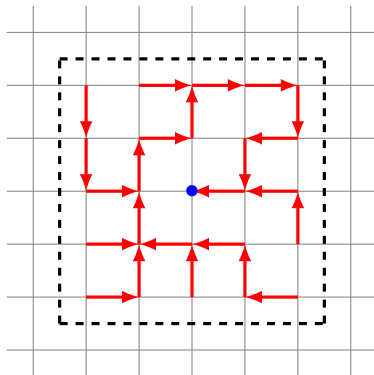


## Uniform spanning forest plus one edge ( $USF^+$ )



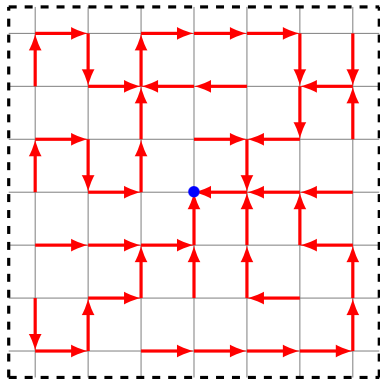
Pick a **spanning tree** of the black box directed to the origin (uniformly at random).

## Uniform spanning forest plus one edge ( $\text{USF}^+$ )



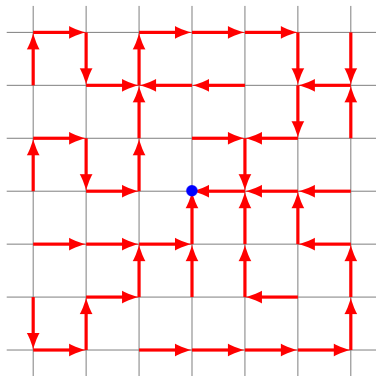
Take the limit as the black box grows until it covers  $\mathbb{Z}^2$ .

## Uniform spanning forest plus one edge ( $\text{USF}^+$ )



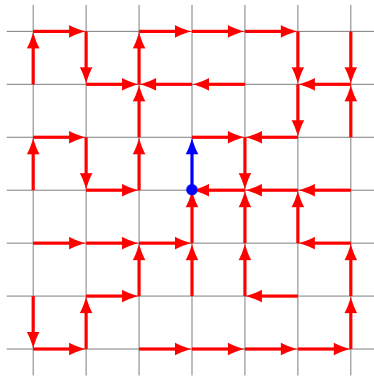
Take the limit as the black box grows until it covers  $\mathbb{Z}^2$ .

## Uniform spanning forest plus one edge ( $\text{USF}^+$ )



Take the limit as the black box grows until it covers  $\mathbb{Z}^2$ .

# Uniform spanning forest plus one edge ( $USF^+$ )



Add a **signpost** from the origin, uniform among the four directions.

## Scaling limit for $p$ -rotor walk on $\mathbb{Z}^2$

Theorem (C., Greco, Levine, Li '21)

Let  $p = \frac{1}{2}$  and let the *uniform spanning forest plus one edge* be the initial signpost configuration. Then, with probability 1, the  $p$ -rotor walk on  $\mathbb{Z}^2$  scales to the standard 2-D Brownian motion:

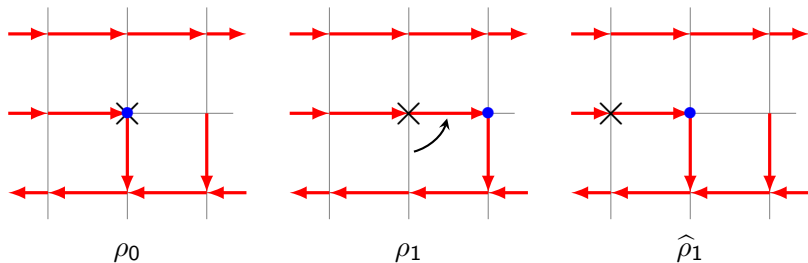
$$\frac{1}{\sqrt{n}} \underbrace{(X_{[nt]})_{t \geq 0}}_{\text{location of the walker at time } [nt]} \xrightarrow{n \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} \underbrace{(B_1(t), B_2(t))_{t \geq 0}}_{\text{independent Brownian motions}}.$$

**Disclaimer:** Proof in the paper was for *h-v walks*, not  $p$ -rotor walks.

# Stationarity from the walker's POV

A signpost configuration  $(\rho_0(x))_{x \in \mathbb{Z}^2}$  is stationary in time from the walker's point of view if

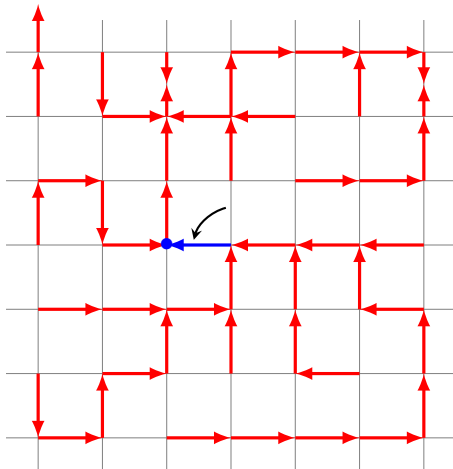
$$\underbrace{(\hat{\rho}_1(x))_{x \in \mathbb{Z}^2}}_{\text{signpost conf. at time 1 from walker's POV}} := (\rho_1(x - X_1))_{x \in \mathbb{Z}^2} \stackrel{d}{=} \underbrace{(\rho_0(x))_{x \in \mathbb{Z}^2}}_{\text{signpost conf. at time 0}}.$$





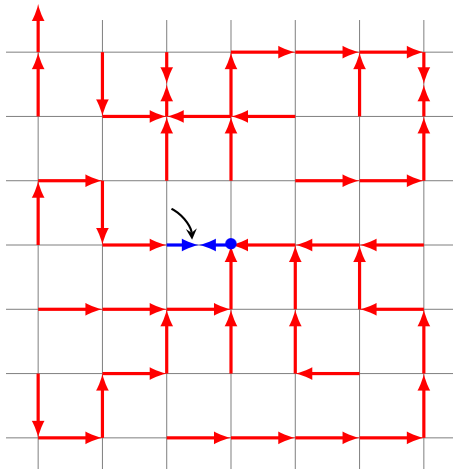


Why is  $USF^+$  stationary from walker's POV?



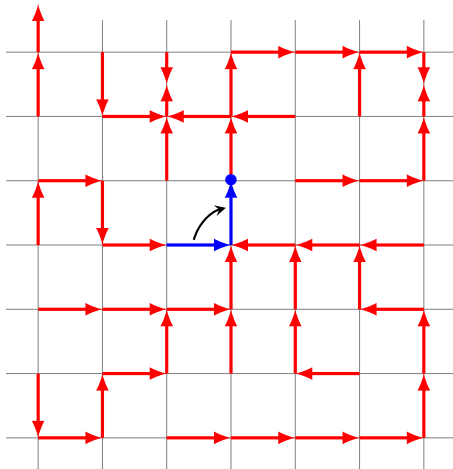
The signposts at previously visited sites form a **tree** oriented toward the walker.

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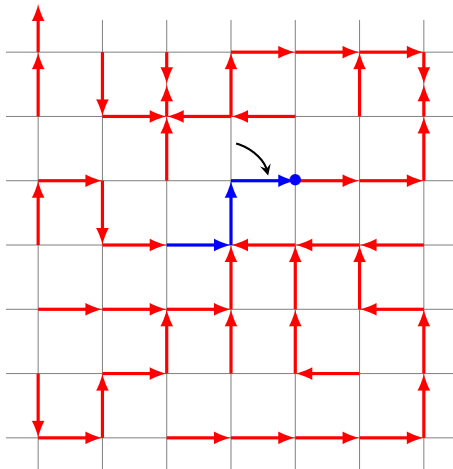
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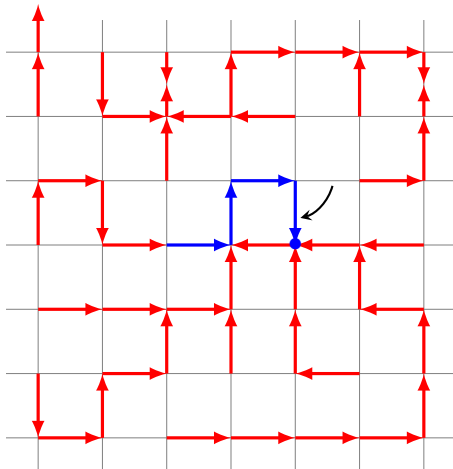
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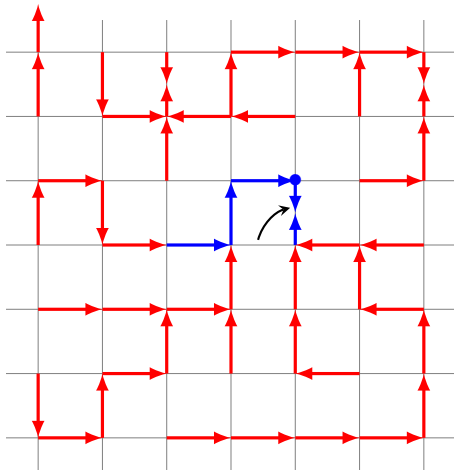
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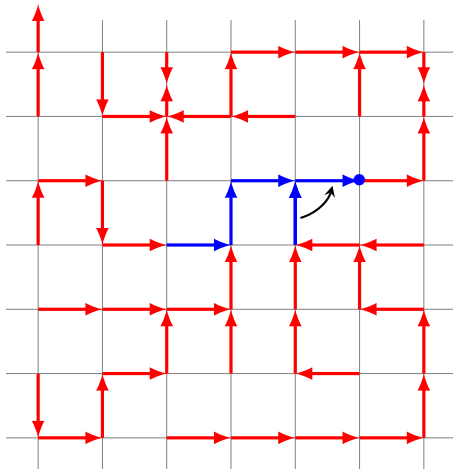
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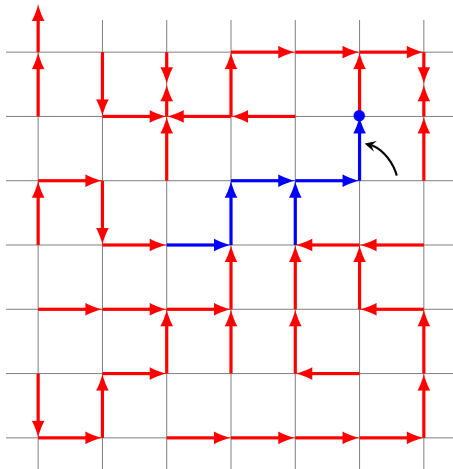
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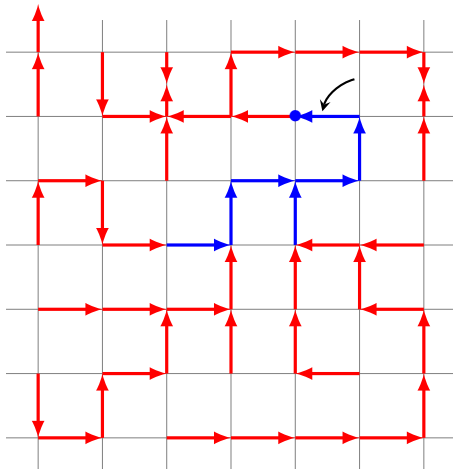
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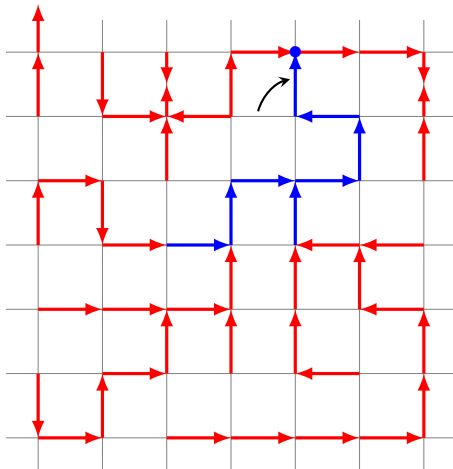


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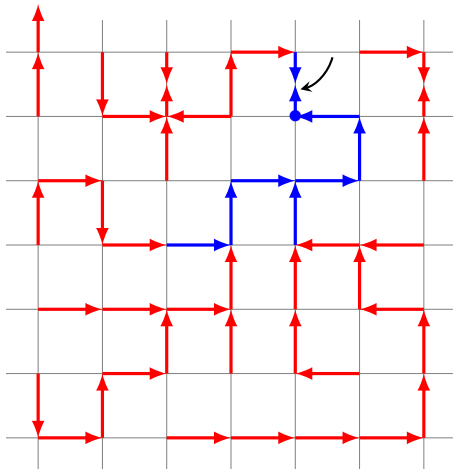
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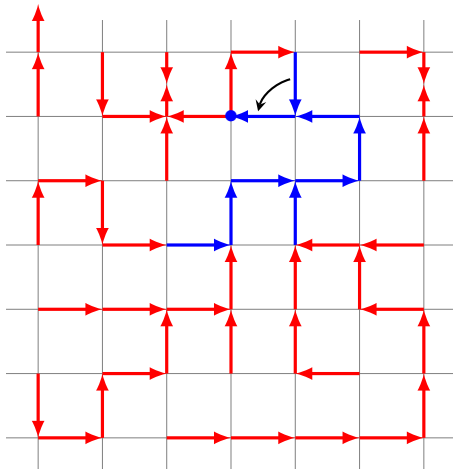
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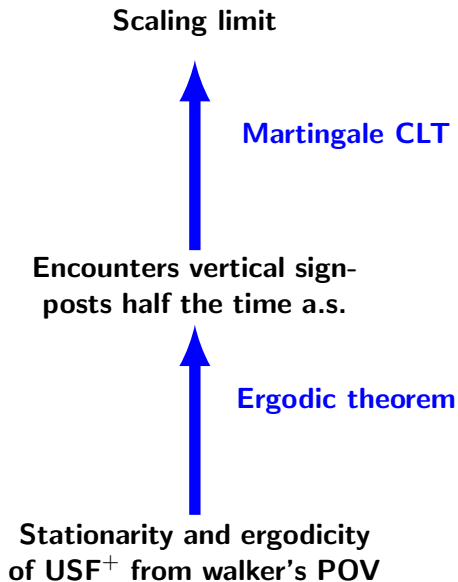
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Why is  $USF^+$  stationary from walker's POV?



The signposts at previously visited sites form a **tree** oriented toward the walker.

# Sketch of the scaling limit proof



So we have proved...

Theorem (C., Greco, Levine, Li '21)

Let  $p = \frac{1}{2}$  and let the *uniform spanning forest plus one edge* be the initial signpost configuration. Then, with probability 1, the  $p$ -rotor walk on  $\mathbb{Z}^2$  scales to the standard 2-D Brownian motion:

$$\frac{1}{\sqrt{n}} \underbrace{(X_{[nt]})_{t \geq 0}}_{\text{location of the walker at time } [nt]} \xrightarrow{n \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} \underbrace{(B_1(t), B_2(t))_{t \geq 0}}_{\text{independent Brownian motions}}$$

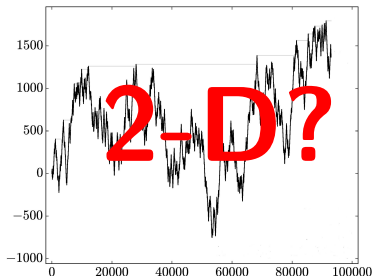
A stylized, red, 3D-effect graphic of the word "Eureka!" with a jagged, starburst-like border around it, indicating a moment of discovery or triumph.

# Open Problem

## Problem

Find the *scaling limit* for the  $p$ -rotor walk with i.i.d. uniform signpost configuration.

Obstacle: Need to define “2-D perturbed Brownian motion (?)”.



# Back to our motivation

Well studied



Simple random walk

Know a little bit now



$\rho$ -rotor walk

Many open problems



Rotor walk



Let's apply what we have learnt to rotor walk.

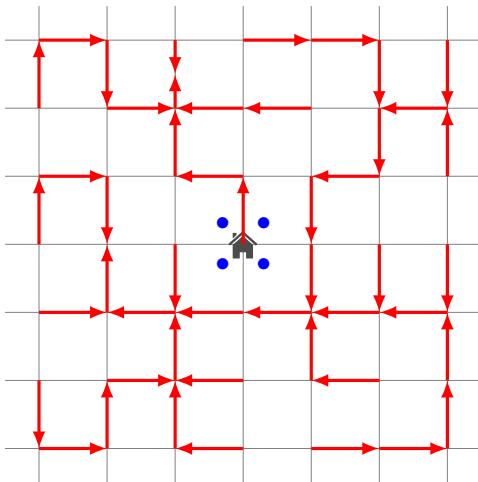


## Escape rate of rotor walk



# Prison break using rotor walk

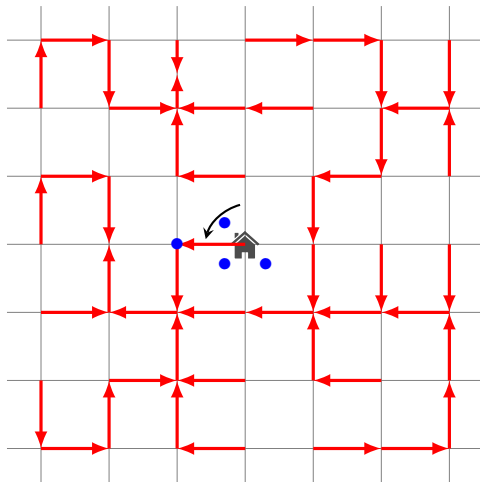
Put  $n$  walkers at the origin (the prison).





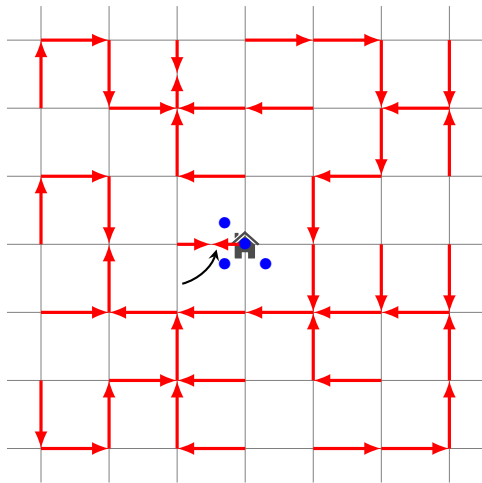
# Prison break using rotor walk

First walker performs rotor walk, remove if returns to prison.



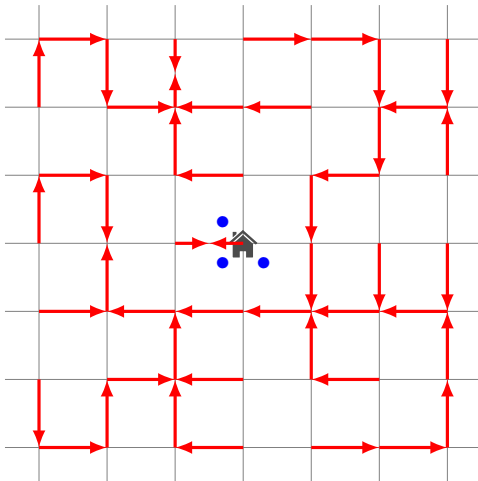
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First walker performs rotor walk, remove if returns to prison.



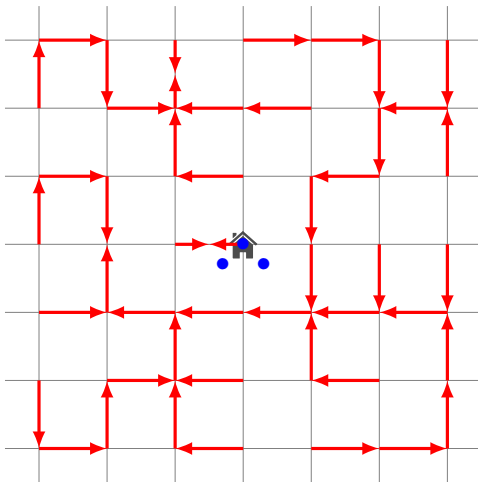
# Prison break using rotor walk

First walker returns to prison, and is removed.



# Prison break using rotor walk

Second walker performs rotor walk, remove if returns to prison.

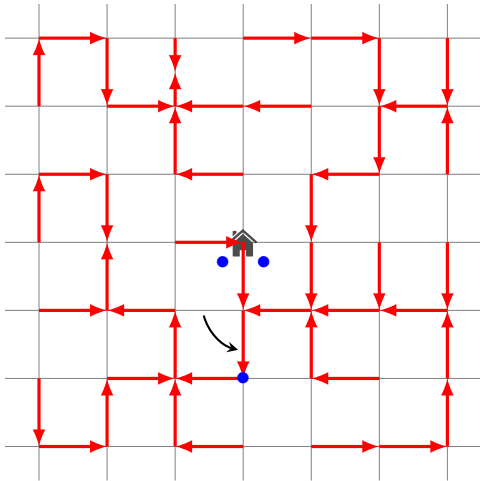






# Prison break using rotor walk

Second walker performs rotor walk, remove if returns to prison.



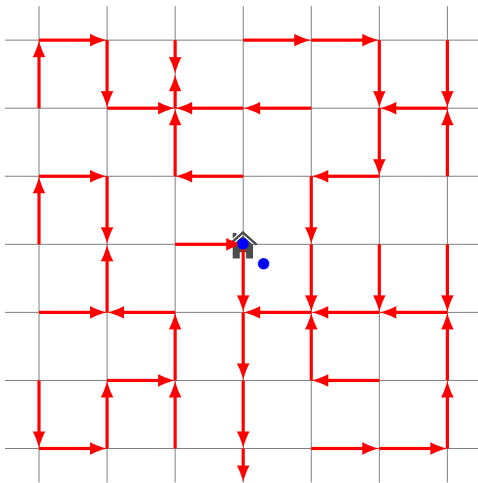






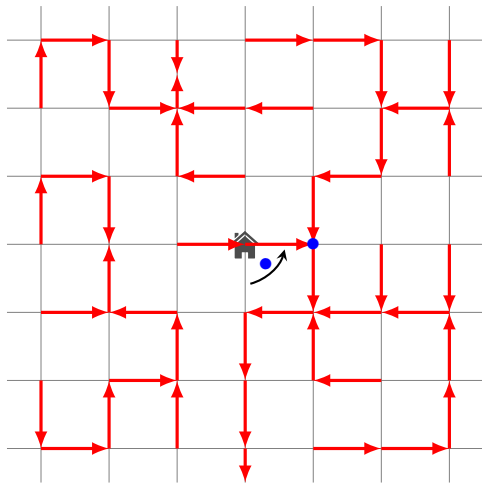
# Prison break using rotor walk

Third walker performs rotor walk, remove if returns to prison.



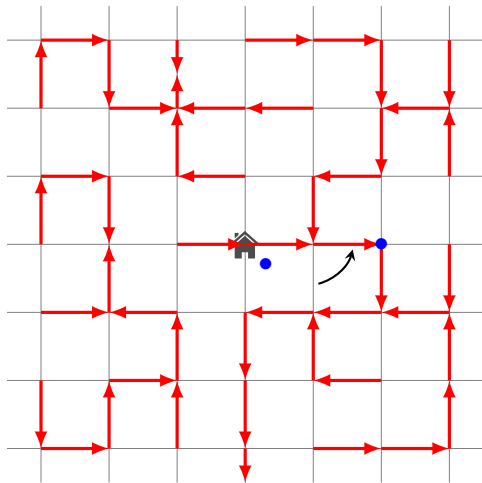
# Prison break using rotor walk

Third walker performs rotor walk, remove if returns to prison.



# Prison break using rotor walk

Third walker performs rotor walk, remove if returns to prison.

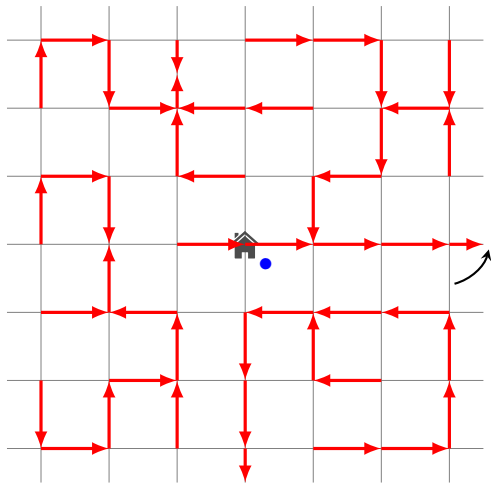






# Prison break using rotor walk

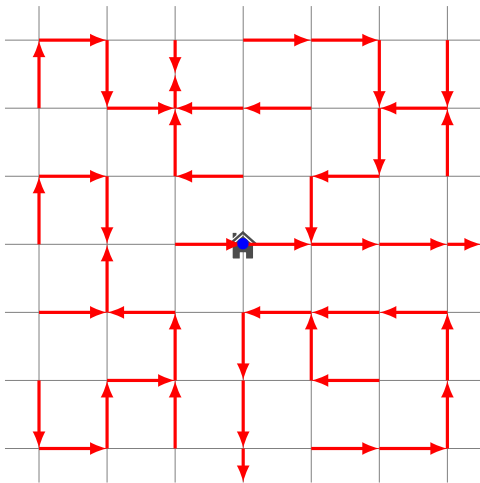
Third walker performs rotor walk, remove if returns to prison.





# Prison break using rotor walk

Fourth walker performs rotor walk, remove if returns to prison.









## Escape rate of rotor walk



The **escape rate** of  $n$  rotor walkers with initial signpost  $\rho$  is

$$r_{\text{esc}}(\rho, n) := \frac{\text{number of escaped walkers}}{n}.$$

The **escape rate of rotor walk** is a deterministic counterpart of the escape probability of simple random walk.

# What was known about escape rate

## Theorem (Schramm '10 (posthumous))

For *any* initial signpost  $\rho$ ,

$$\limsup_{n \rightarrow \infty} \underbrace{r_{\text{esc}}(\rho, n)}_{\substack{\text{escape rate} \\ \text{of rotor walk}}} \leq \underbrace{p_{\text{esc}}(\text{SRW})}_{\substack{\text{escape prob.} \\ \text{of SRW}}}.$$

## Corollary

On  $\mathbb{Z}^2$ , for *any* initial signpost  $\rho$ ,

$$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} r_{\text{esc}}(\rho, n) = p_{\text{esc}}(\text{SRW}) = 0.$$

In fact, this is true for all *recurrent* graphs.



## What was known about escape rate

Theorem (Angel Holroyd '09)

On  $\mathbb{Z}^d$  with  $d \geq 3$ , there *exists* an initial signpost  $\rho$  so that

$$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} r_{\text{esc}}(\rho, n) = 0.$$

Theorem (Florescu Ganguly Levine Peres '13)

On  $\mathbb{Z}^d$  with  $d \geq 3$ , for the *one-directional* initial signpost  $\rho$ ,

$$\liminf_{n \rightarrow \infty} r_{\text{esc}}(\rho, n) > 0.$$

# Escape rate conjecture

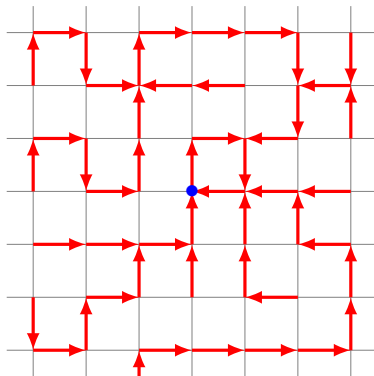
## Conjecture (FGLP '13)

For *any transient* graph, there *exists* an initial signpost  $\rho$  for which

$$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} r_{\text{esc}}(\rho, n) = p_{\text{esc}}(\text{SRW}).$$

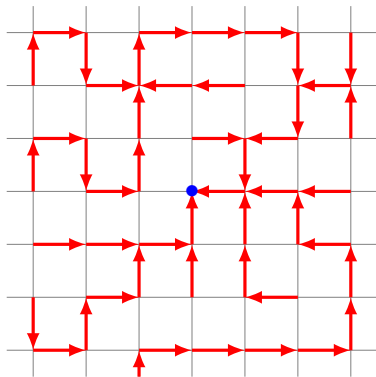


# Uniform spanning forest oriented to infinity ( $\text{USF}^\infty$ )



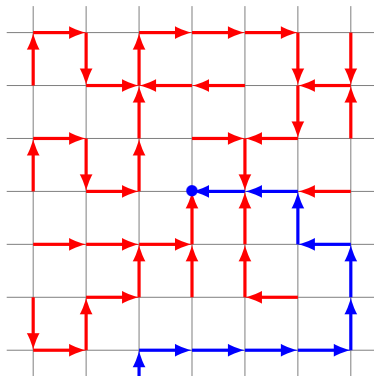
Start with uniform spanning forest plus one edge from before.

# Uniform spanning forest oriented to infinity ( $USF^\infty$ )



Remove the signpost at the origin.

# Uniform spanning forest oriented to infinity ( $USF^\infty$ )



Find the unique infinite path oriented to origin.



# Answering the escape rate conjecture

Theorem (C. '19)

On  $\mathbb{Z}^d$ , almost every  $\rho$  sampled from  $\text{USF}^\infty$  satisfies

$$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} r_{\text{esc}}(\rho, n) = p_{\text{esc}}(\text{SRW}).$$

## Proof sketch

On one hand, for all initial signpost  $\rho$ ,

$$r_{\text{esc}}(\rho, n) \leq p_{\text{esc}}(\text{SRW}) + \frac{C}{n^2} \quad (\text{A})$$

for some  $C > 0$ , by Schramm's inequality.

On the other hand, for  $\rho$  sampled from  $\text{USF}^\infty$ ,

$$\mathbb{E}_{\rho \sim \text{USF}^\infty} [r_{\text{esc}}(\rho, n)] \geq p_{\text{esc}}(\text{SRW}) \quad (\text{B})$$

by infinite-step stationarity of  $\text{USF}^\infty$ .

How to combine (A) and (B) to get

$$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} r_{\text{esc}}(\rho, n) = p_{\text{esc}}(\text{SRW})$$

for almost every  $\rho$  sampled from  $\text{USF}^\infty$ ?



## An advice from a wiseman



## Proof sketch (continued)

Fix  $\varepsilon > 0$ . Let  $A_n$  be set of initial signposts  $\rho$  such that

$$A_n := \left\{ \left| r_{\text{esc}}(\rho, n) - p_{\text{esc}}(\text{SRW}) \right| > \varepsilon \right\},$$

i.e.  $n$ -th rotor walk escape rate differs from escape probability of simple random walk by more than  $\varepsilon$ .

We need to show  $A_n$  occurs only finitely many times for almost every  $\rho$  sampled from  $\text{USF}^\infty$ .

By Borel–Cantelli lemma, it suffices to show

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \mathbb{P}[A_n] < \infty.$$

## Proof sketch (continued)

By Markov's inequality,

$$\mathbb{P}[A_n] \leq \frac{1}{\varepsilon} \mathbb{E} \left[ \left| r_{\text{esc}}(\rho, n) - p_{\text{esc}}(\text{SRW}) \right| \right].$$

By triangle inequality, RHS is less than

$$\frac{1}{\varepsilon} \mathbb{E} \left[ \left| r_{\text{esc}}(\rho, n) - p_{\text{esc}}(\text{SRW}) - \frac{C}{n^2} \right| \right] + \frac{C}{\varepsilon n^2}.$$

## Proof sketch (continued)

Recall that we already have

$$r_{\text{esc}}(\rho, n) \leq p_{\text{esc}}(\text{SRW}) + \frac{C}{n^2}. \quad (\text{A})$$

So the term inside  $\mathbb{E}[\cdot]$  is negative,

$$\mathbb{P}[A_n] \leq \frac{1}{\varepsilon} \mathbb{E} \left[ p_{\text{esc}}(\text{SRW}) + \frac{C}{n^2} - r_{\text{esc}}(\rho, n) \right] + \frac{C}{\varepsilon n^2}.$$

By linearity of expectation,

$$\mathbb{P}[A_n] \leq \frac{1}{\varepsilon} \left( p_{\text{esc}}(\text{SRW}) + \frac{C}{n^2} - \mathbb{E}[r_{\text{esc}}(\rho, n)] \right) + \frac{C}{\varepsilon n^2}.$$

## Proof sketch (continued)

On the other hand, we already have

$$\mathbb{E}[r_{\text{esc}}(\rho, n)] \geq p_{\text{esc}}(\text{SRW}). \quad (\text{B})$$

So we can cancel these two terms,

$$\mathbb{P}[A_n] \leq \frac{1}{\varepsilon} \left( \cancel{p_{\text{esc}}(\text{SRW})} + \frac{C}{n^2} - \cancel{\mathbb{E}[r_{\text{esc}}(\rho, n)]} \right) + \frac{C}{\varepsilon n^2}.$$

This gives us

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \mathbb{P}[A_n] \leq \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{2C}{\varepsilon n^2} < \infty.$$

So we have proved ...

Theorem (C. '19)

On  $\mathbb{Z}^d$ , almost every  $\rho$  sampled from  $\text{USF}^\infty$  satisfies

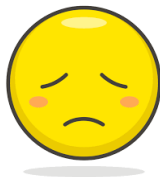
$$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} r_{\text{esc}}(\rho, n) = p_{\text{esc}}(\text{SRW}).$$

Remark: Similar result applies to all vertex-transitive graphs.



## Except that ...

- The conjecture of FGLP '13 is for **all transient graphs**;
- There are already other constructions for the **special case** of  $\mathbb{Z}^d$  (He '14) and trees (Angel Holroyd '11);
- Our construction of the initial signpost  $\rho$  is **not deterministic**.

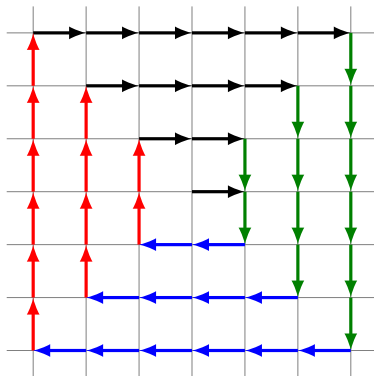


# Complete answer to the escape rate conjecture

Theorem (C., '20)

For any transient graph, the initial signpost  $\rho_{\max}$  satisfies

$$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} r_{\text{esc}}(\rho_{\max}, n) = p_{\text{esc}}(\text{SRW}).$$





# Escape rate formula

## Lemma

For any initial signpost  $\rho$  and number of walkers  $n$ ,

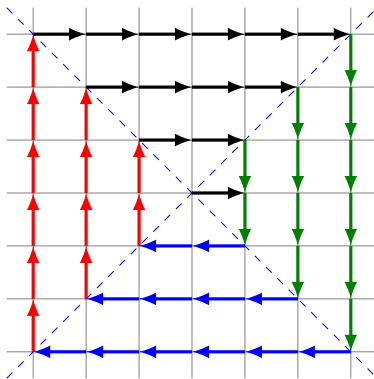
$$r_{\text{esc}}(\rho, n) = p_{\text{esc}}(\text{SRW}) - \sum_{x \in \mathbb{Z}^d} \left( \underbrace{w_x[\rho_n(x)]}_{\text{signpost at } x \text{ after } n\text{-th walk}} - \underbrace{w_x[\rho(x)]}_{\text{initial signpost at } x} \right),$$

where  $w_x$  is a local compensator term.

The formula is inspired by the [martingale](#) used in proving recurrence for  $p$ -rotor walk.

## Our initial signpost configuration

The configuration  $\rho_{\max}$  is constructed by choosing, for each  $x$ , the direction  $\rho_{\max}(x)$  that maximizes compensator  $w_x$ .



## Proof of the escape rate conjecture

- By the [escape rate formula](#),

$$r_{\text{esc}}(\rho, n) = p_{\text{esc}}(SRW) - \sum_{x \in \mathbb{Z}^d} \left( \mathfrak{w}_x[\rho_n(x)] - \mathfrak{w}_x[\rho(x)] \right),$$

- By our choice of  $\rho_{\text{max}}$ ,

$$r_{\text{esc}}(\rho_{\text{max}}, n) \geq p_{\text{esc}}(SRW).$$

- On the other hand, [Schramm's inequality](#) gives us

$$\limsup_{n \rightarrow \infty} r_{\text{esc}}(\rho_{\text{max}}, n) \leq p_{\text{esc}}(SRW).$$

- Hence,

$$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} r_{\text{esc}}(\rho_{\text{max}}, n) = p_{\text{esc}}(SRW).$$

So we have proved...

Theorem (C., '20)

For any transient graph, the initial signpost  $\rho_{\max}$  satisfies

$$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} r_{\text{esc}}(\rho_{\max}, n) = p_{\text{esc}}(\text{SRW}).$$

A stylized, red, 3D-effect graphic of the word "Eureka!" with a jagged, starburst-like border around it, indicating a moment of discovery or triumph.

# Open problem

## Conjecture

*For any graph, the i.i.d. uniform signpost configuration has rotor walk **escape rate** equal to the escape probability of the SRW, i.e.,*

$$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} r_{\text{esc}}(\rho, n) = p_{\text{esc}}(\text{SRW}).$$

So far has only been proved for regular trees (Angel Holroyd '11).



# THANK YOU!

