

Darts, Dice, and Coins

Sampling from a Discrete Distribution



The Problem Statement

- You are given an n -sided loaded die with probabilities p_1, p_2, \dots, p_n of sides $1, 2, \dots, n$ coming up.
- What is the most efficient algorithm for simulating rolls of the die?

The Computational Model

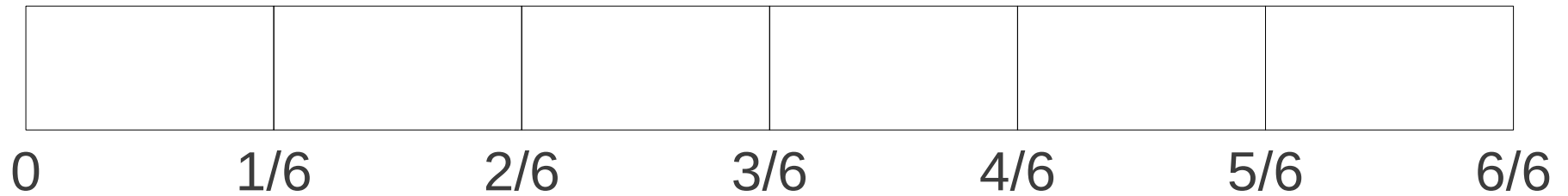
- Assume that the following can be done in $O(1)$ time:
 - Generation of a uniformly-random real number in the interval $[0, 1)$
 - Addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, and comparisons of real numbers.
 - Floor and ceiling of real numbers.

Simulating a Fair Die

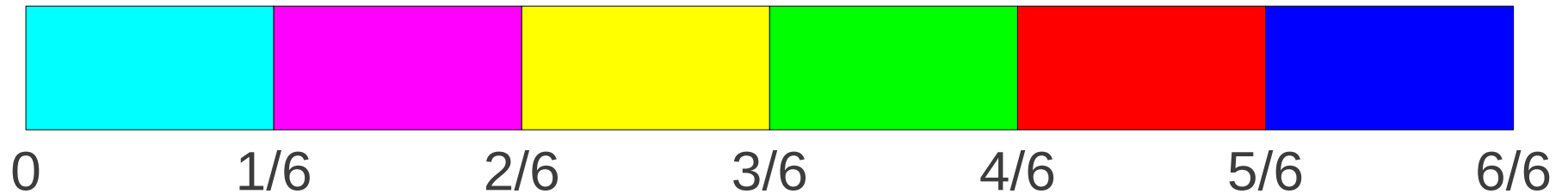
Simulating a Fair Six-Sided Die



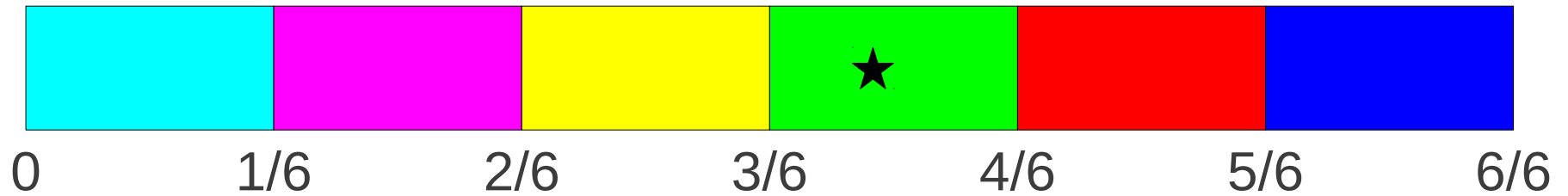
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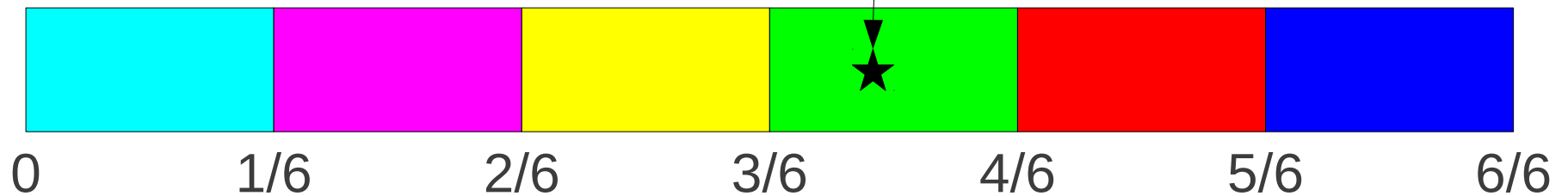


Simulating a Fair Six-Sided Die



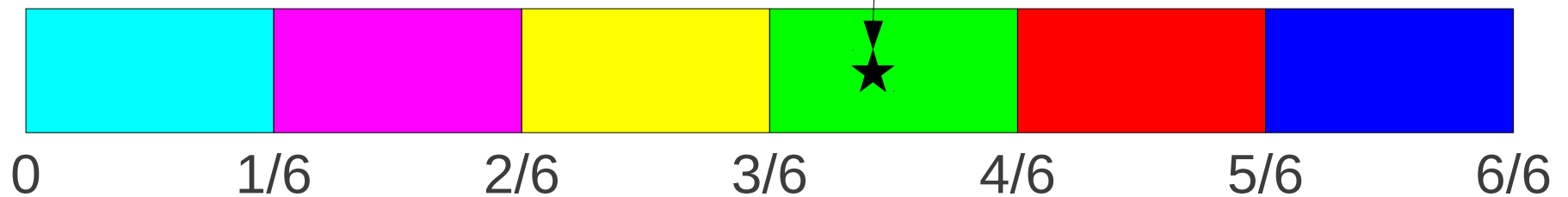
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A uniformly-distributed value x in the range $[0, 1)$



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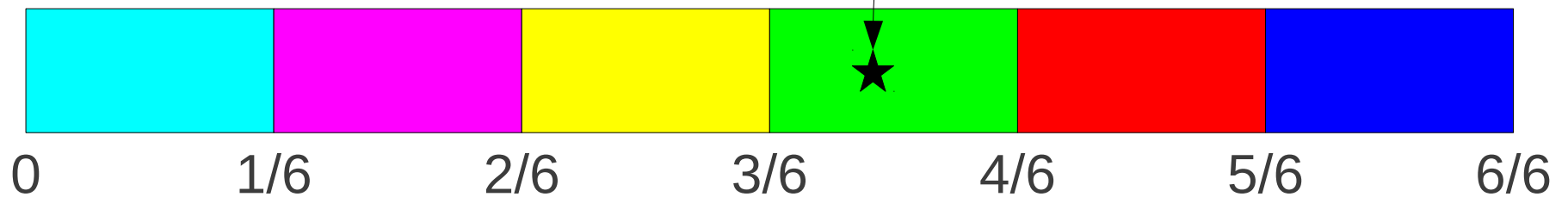


What is the largest integer k such that

$$k/6 < x?$$

Simulating a Fair Six-Sided Die

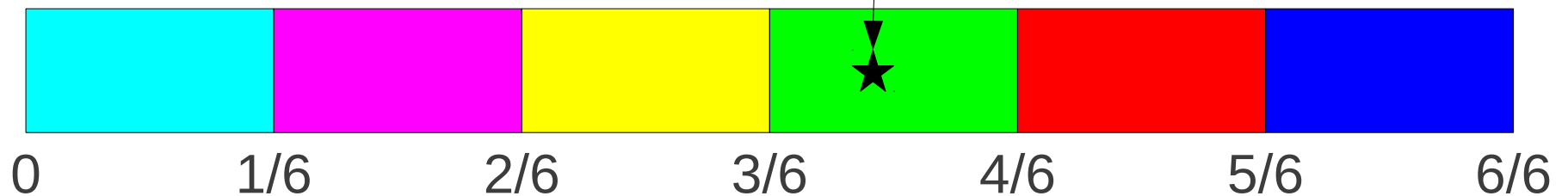
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What is the largest integer k such that $k < 6x$?

Simulating a Fair Six-Sided Die

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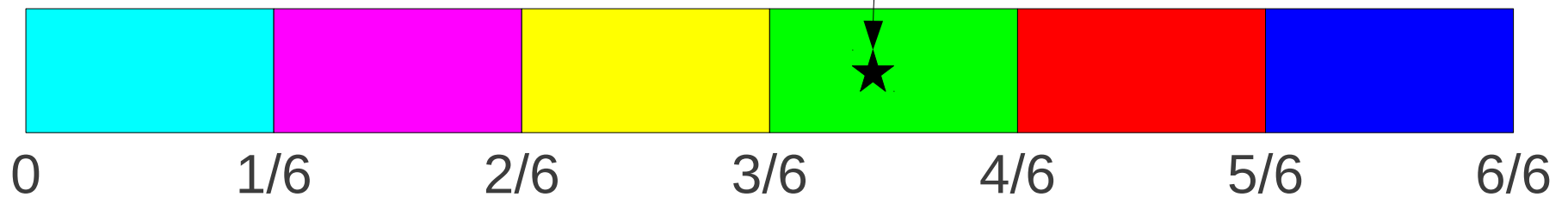
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$$k = \lfloor 6x \rfloor$$

Simulating a Fair Six-Sided Die

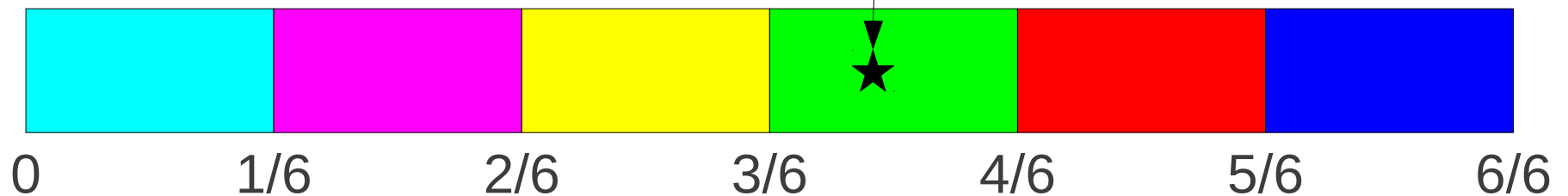
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1. Generate a random value $x \in [0, 1)$
2. Output $k = \lfloor 6x \rfloor$

Simulating a Fair Six-Sided Die

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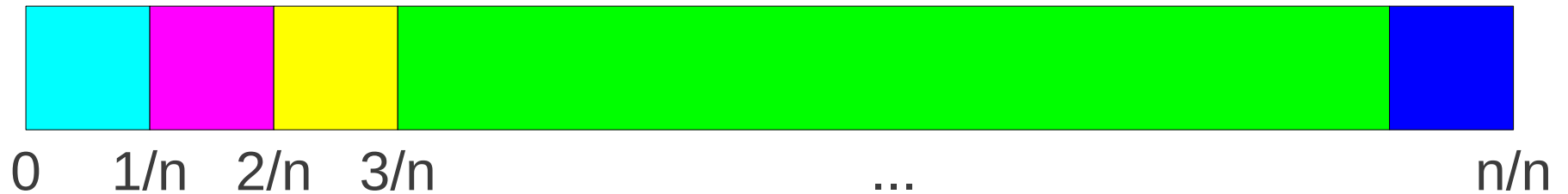


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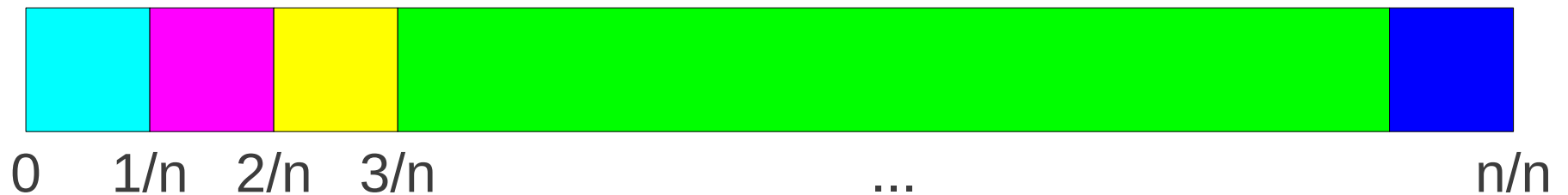
Time required: **$O(1)$**

Simulating a Fair n -Sided Die

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Simulating a Fair n-Sided Die



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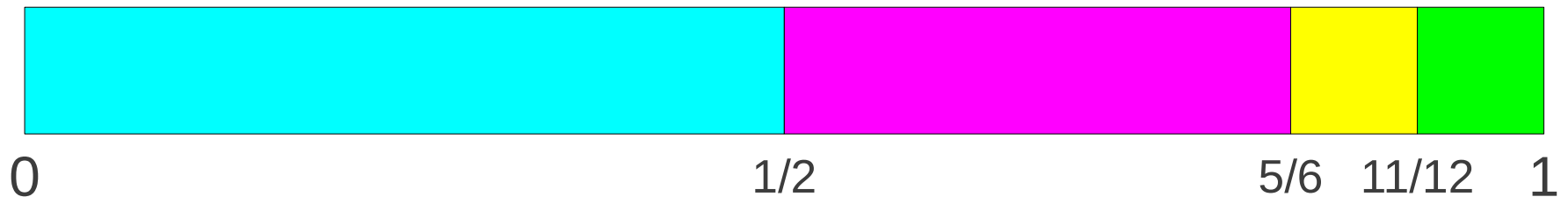
Can we simulate a loaded die
with a fair die?

A Sample Loaded Die

- A four-sided die:
 - $p_1 = 1/2$
 - $p_2 = 1/3$
 - $p_3 = 1/12$
 - $p_4 = 1/12$

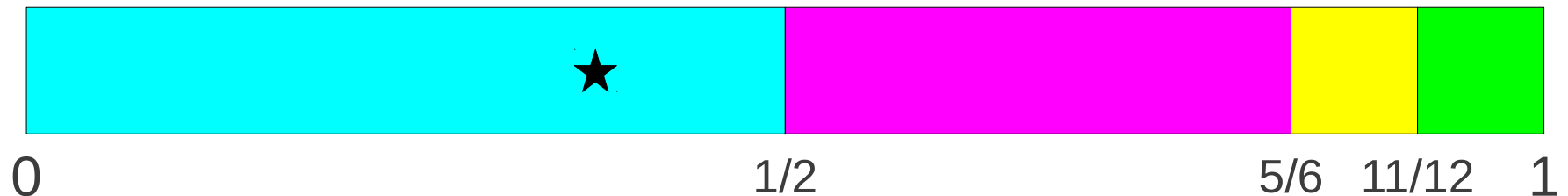
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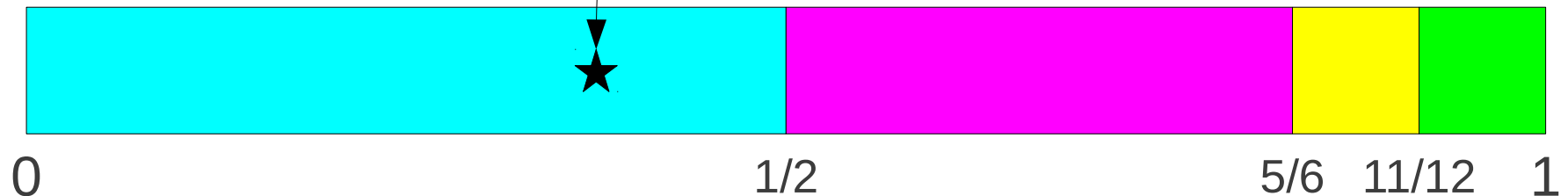
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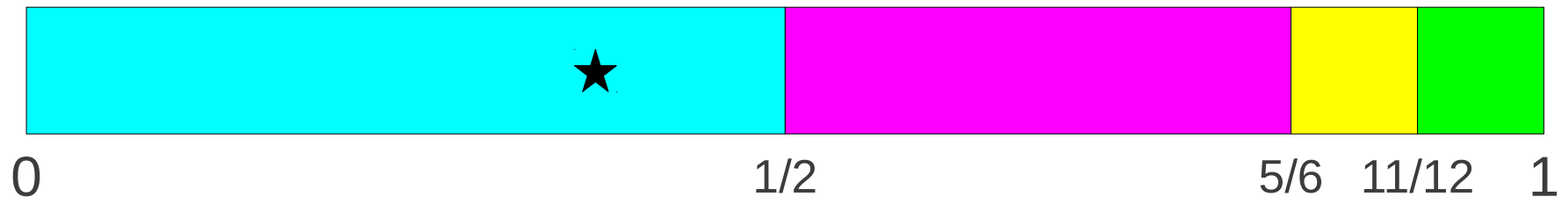
- $p_4 = 1/12$

How do we know
which bucket this
point is in?



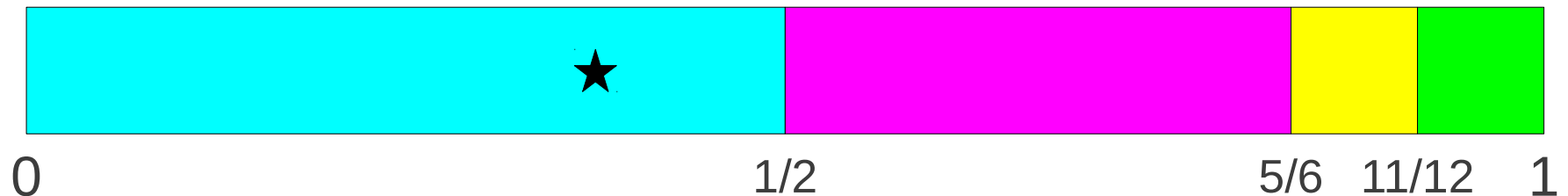
A Sample Loaded Die

- A four-sided die:
 - $p_1 = 6/12$
 - $p_2 = 4/12$
 - $p_3 = 1/12$
 - $p_4 = 1/12$



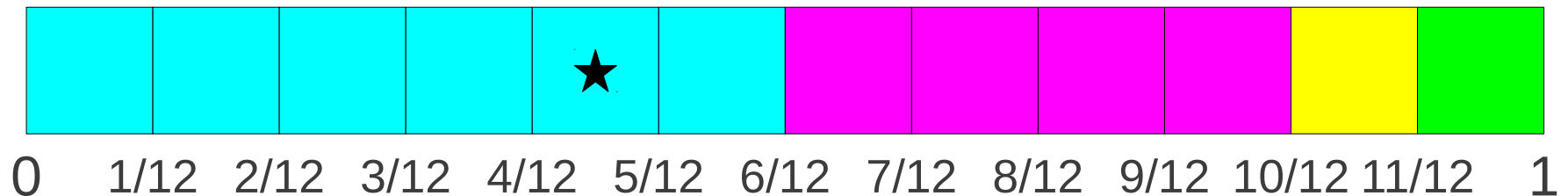
A Sample Loaded Die

- A four-sided die:
 - $p_1 = 6/12$
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- A 12-sided fair die:
 - Six sides labeled 1
 - Four sides labeled 2
 - One side labeled 3
 - One side labeled 4



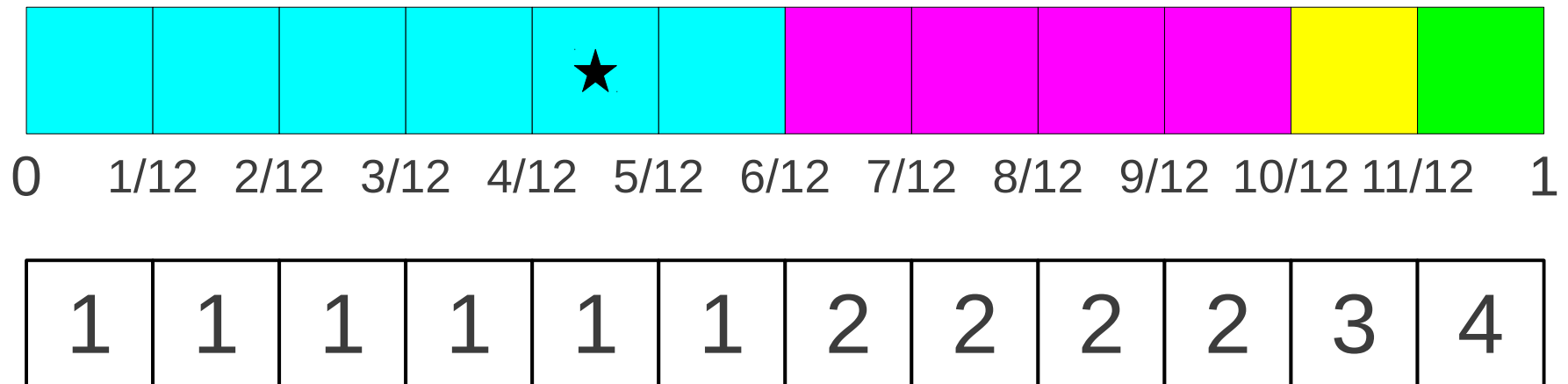
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Loaded Dice from Fair Dice

- Normalize the probabilities so that they have the same denominator d .
- Create a fair d -sided die, and label the sides with a frequency that guarantees the original probabilities.
- Roll the fair die, then report the result.

The Catch

- The common denominator can be *huge*!
- Example: $1/1,000,000$ and $999,999/1,000,000$ requires a one-million-sided die to simulate a two-sided die.
 - Can require arbitrarily many sides with just two outcomes.
- Storing the table necessary to map back to the original distribution is completely infeasible here.
- Algorithm impractical unless we know something about the inputs in advance.

Simulating a Biased Coin

Simulating a Biased Coin



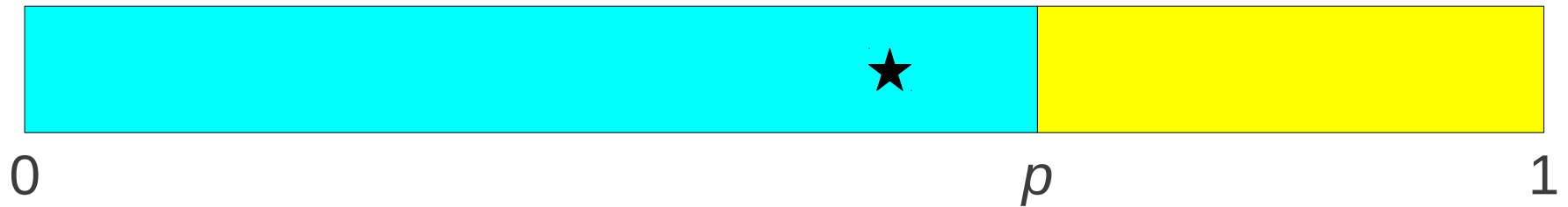
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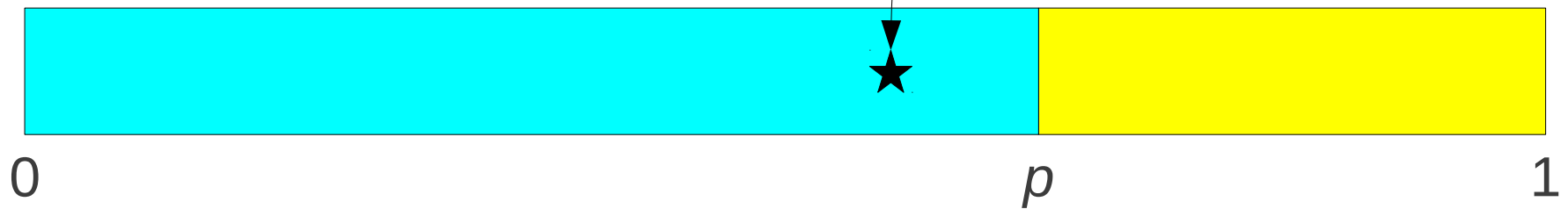


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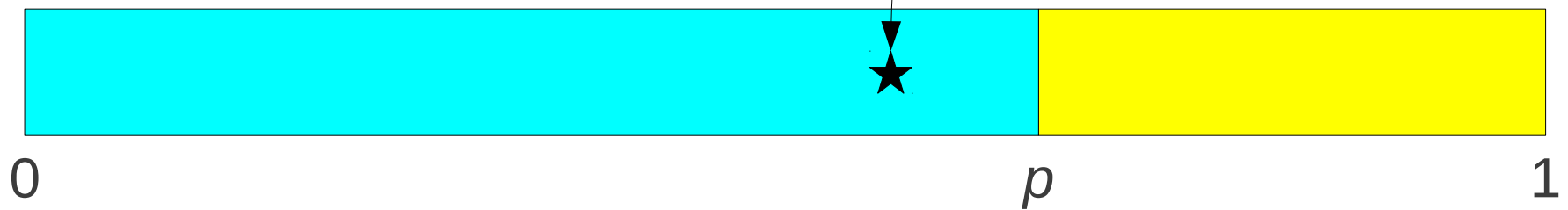
Simulating a Biased Coin

A uniformly-distributed value x in the range $[0, 1)$



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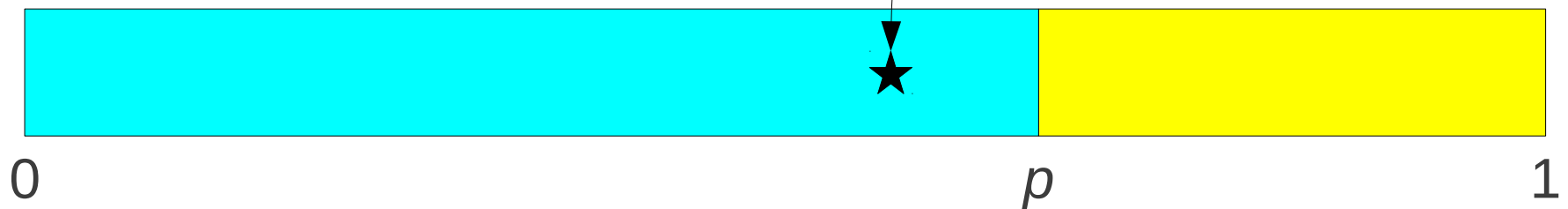
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What bucket does x belong to?

Simulating a Biased Coin

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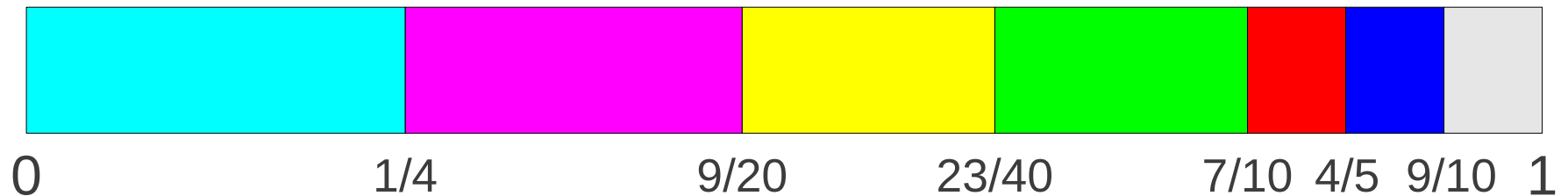
If $x < p$, output “heads”
Otherwise output “tails.”

Generalizing This Idea

- A 7-sided die:
 - $p_1 = 1/4$
 - $p_2 = 1/5$
 - $p_3 = 1/8$
 - $p_4 = 1/8$
 - $p_5 = 1/10$
 - $p_6 = 1/10$
 - $p_7 = 1/10$

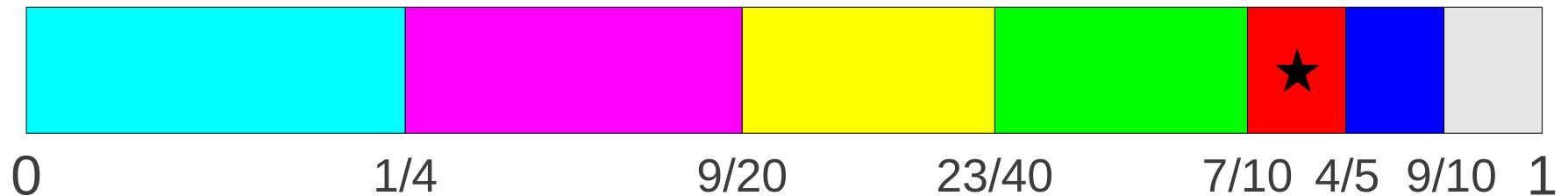
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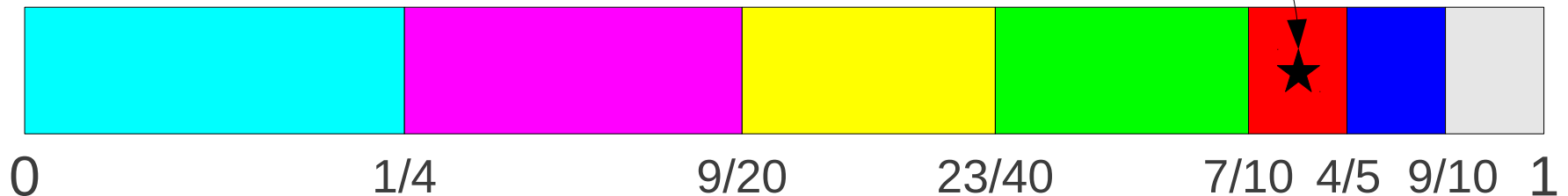
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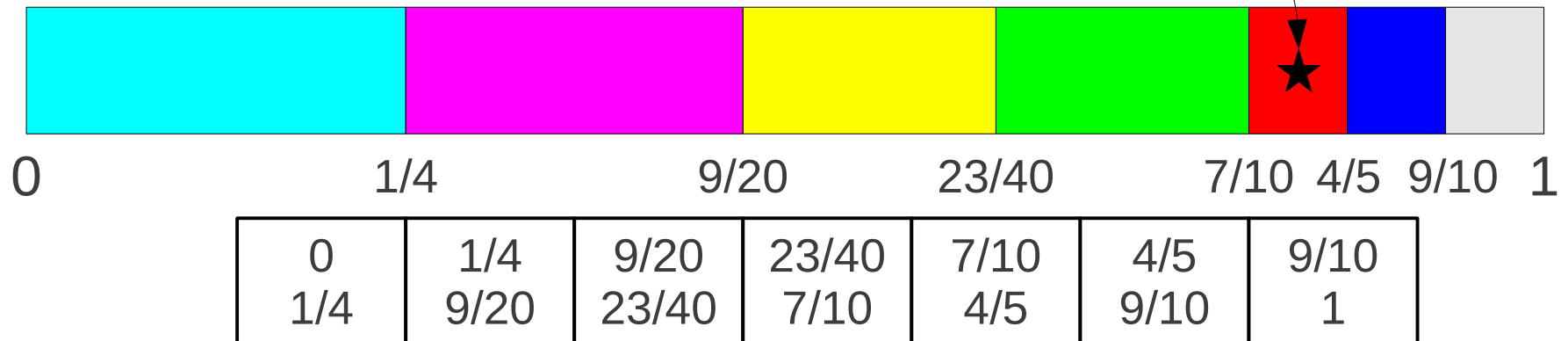
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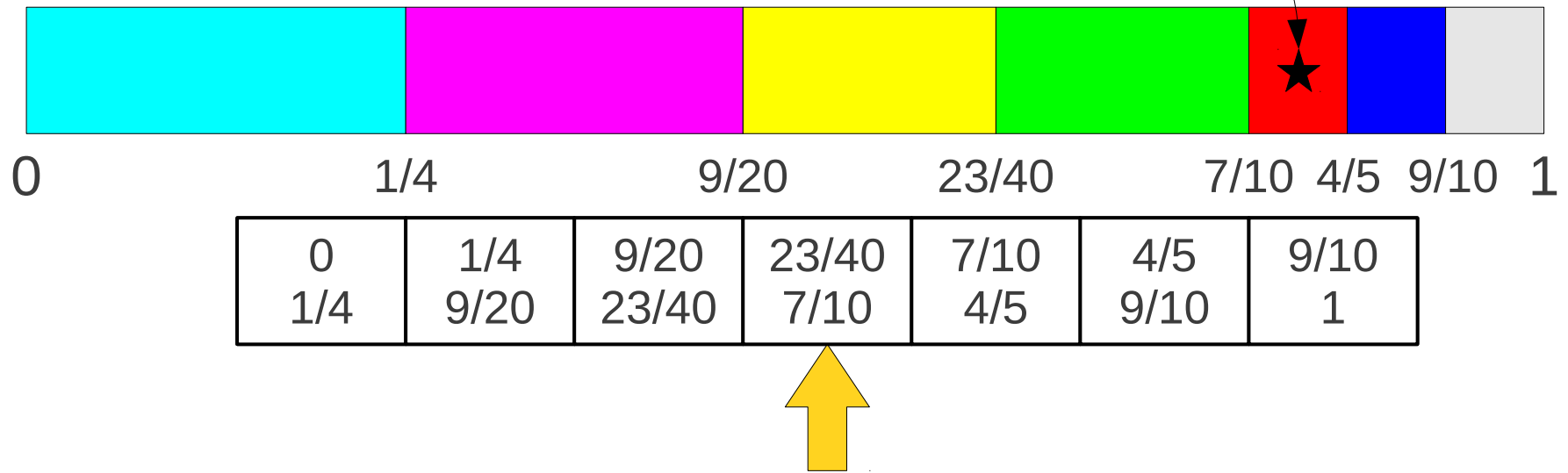
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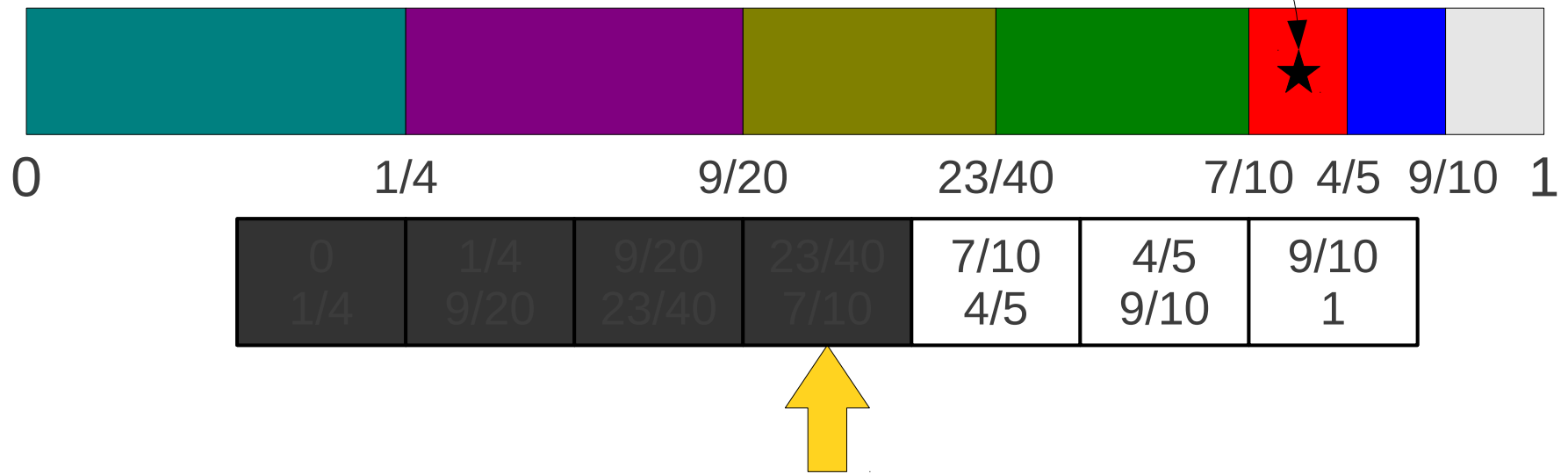
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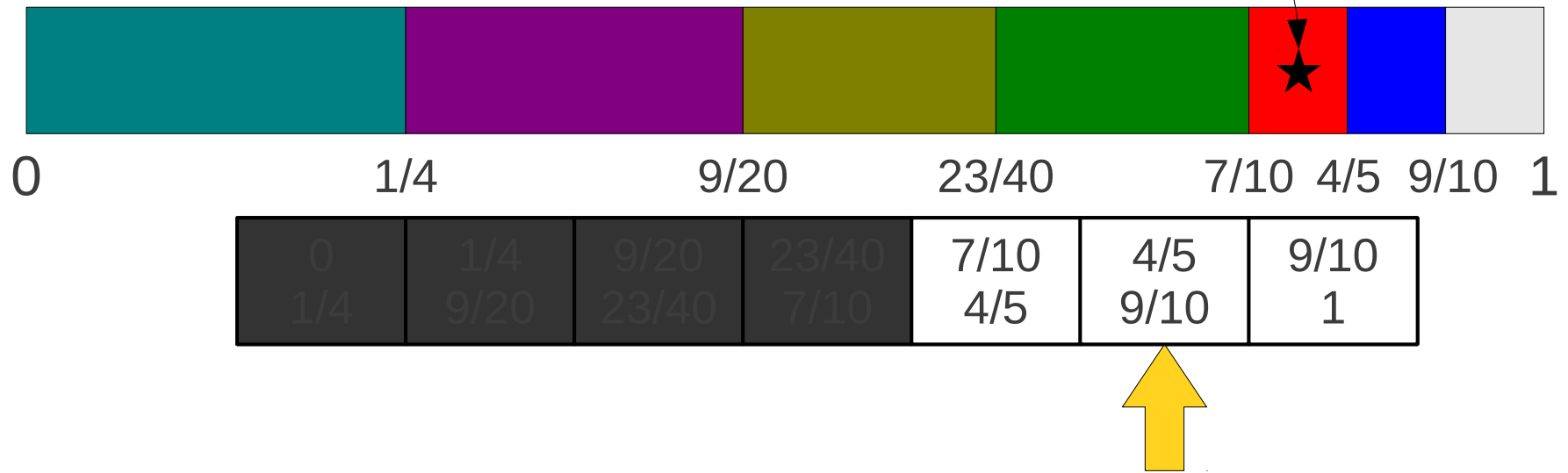
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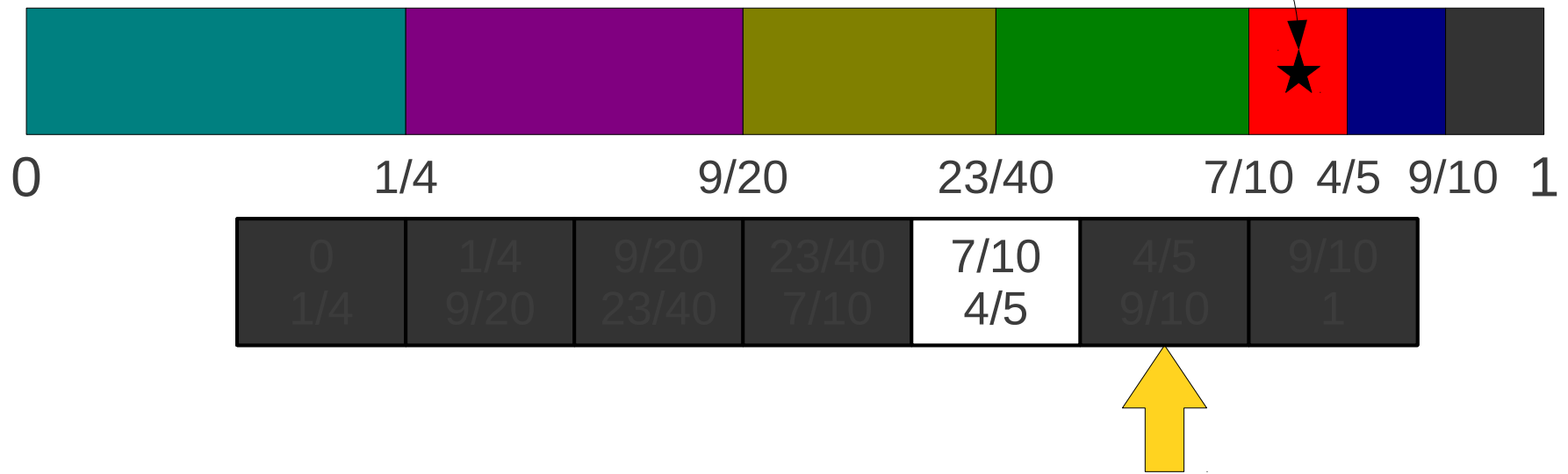
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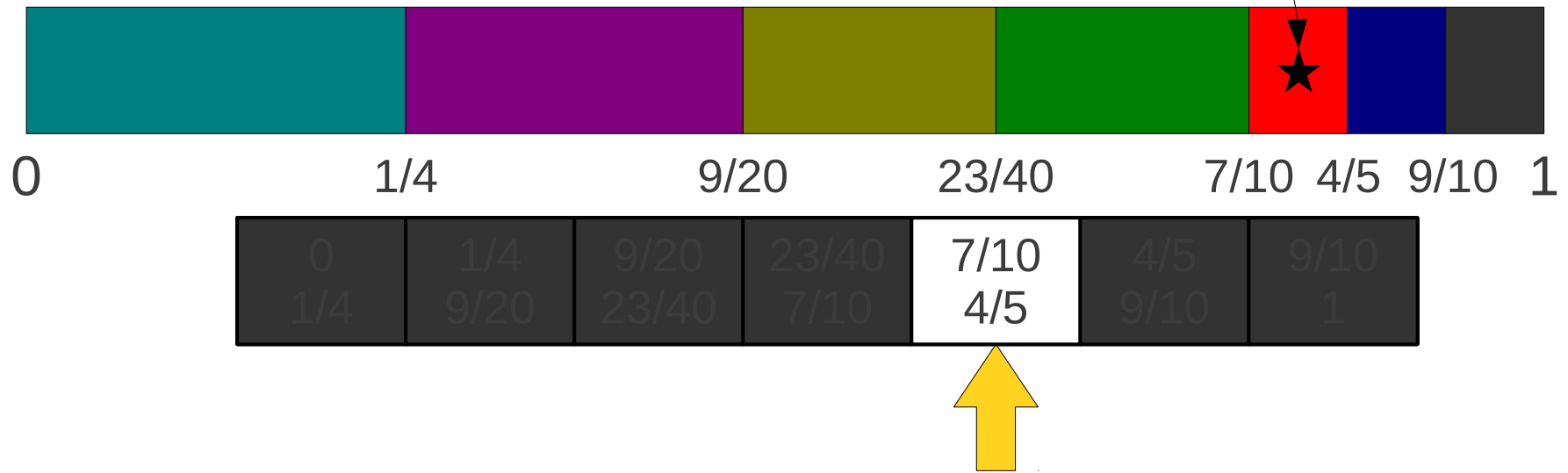
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Roulette Wheel Selection

- Construct a **cumulative probability table** containing a running total of the probabilities so far.
- To simulate the loaded die:
 - Generate a random value in $[0, 1)$.
 - Do a binary search on the table for the bucket.
- Initialization time: $\Theta(n)$
- Generation time: $O(\log n)$

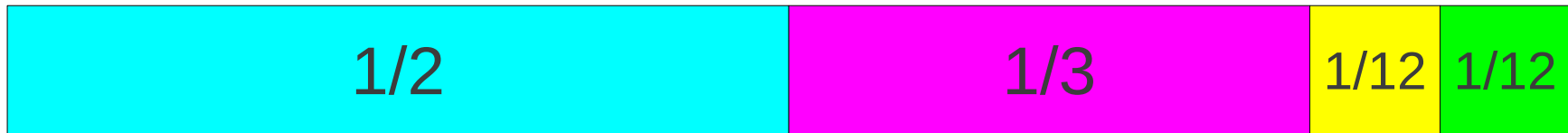
Throwing Darts

A Sample Loaded Die

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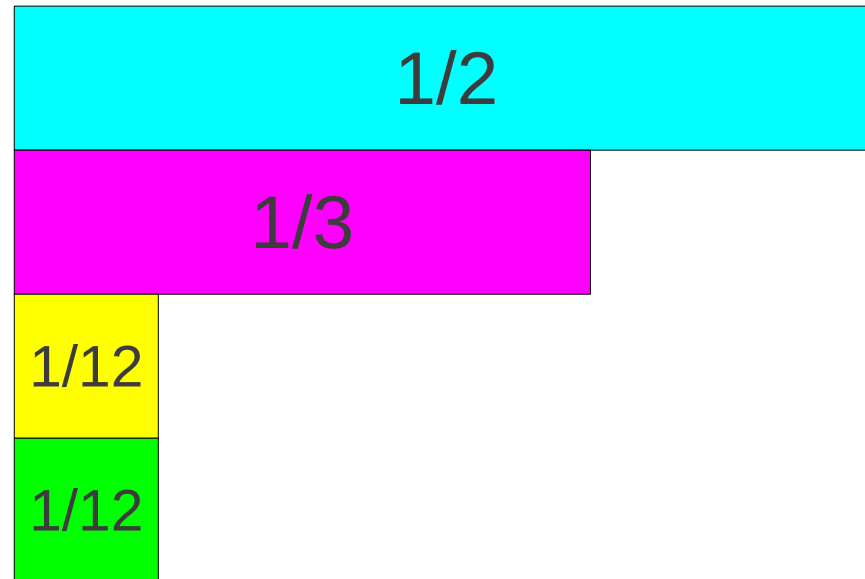
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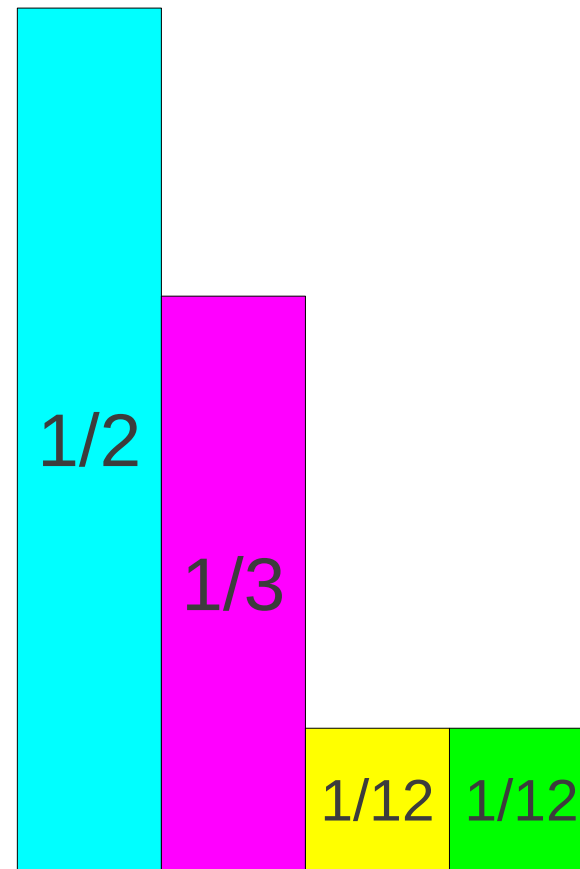
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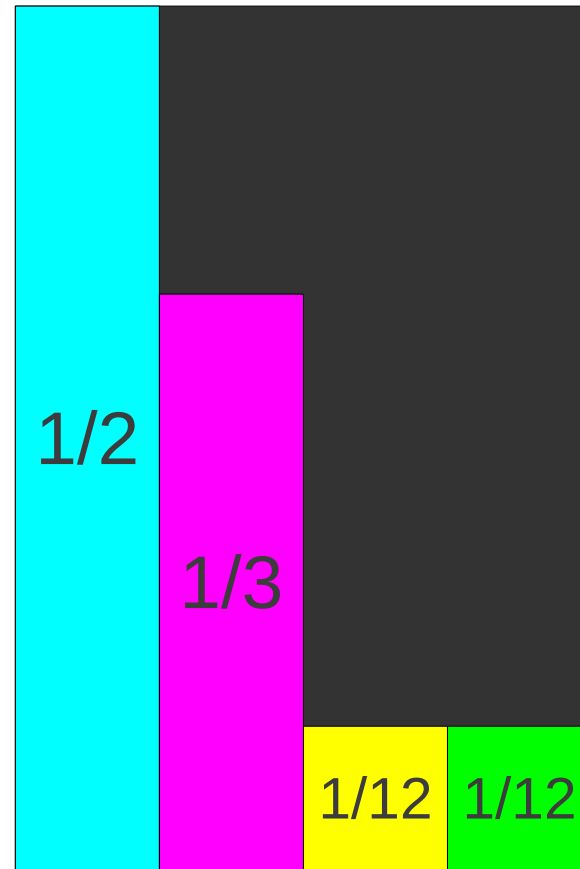
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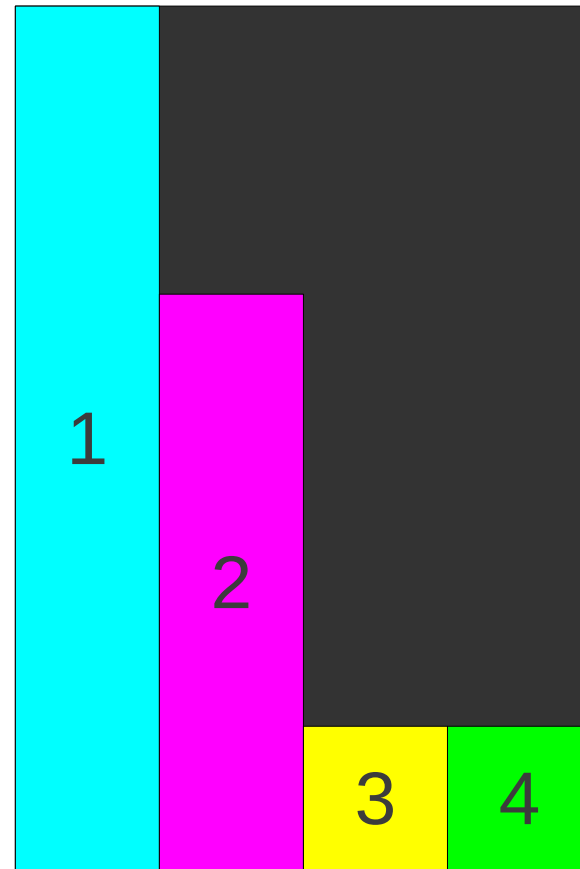
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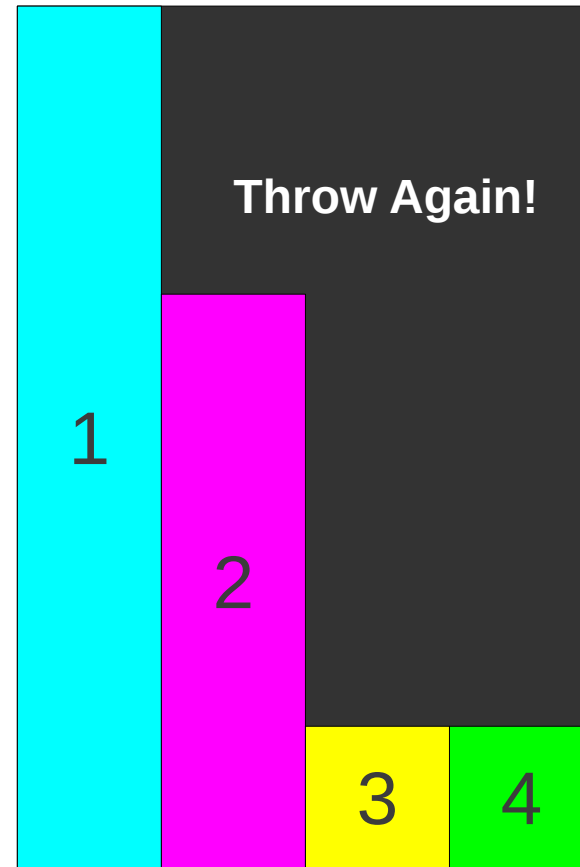
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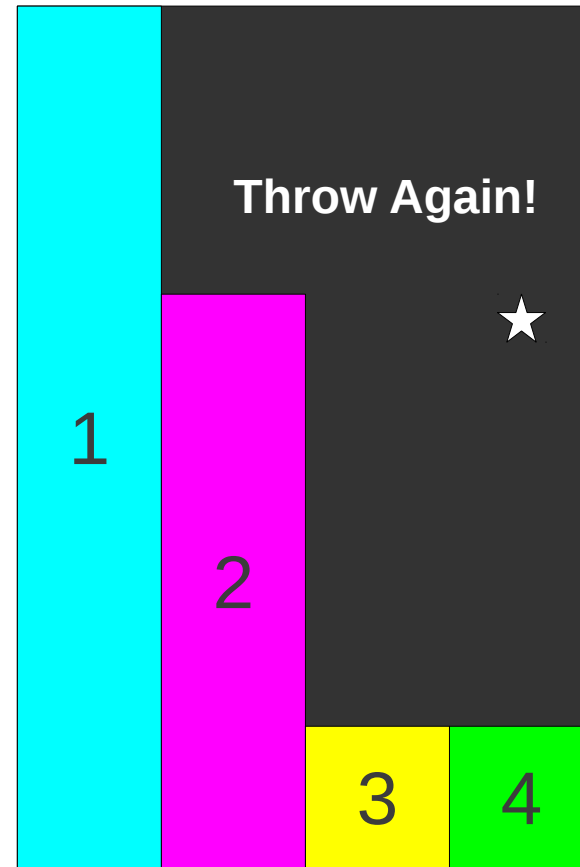
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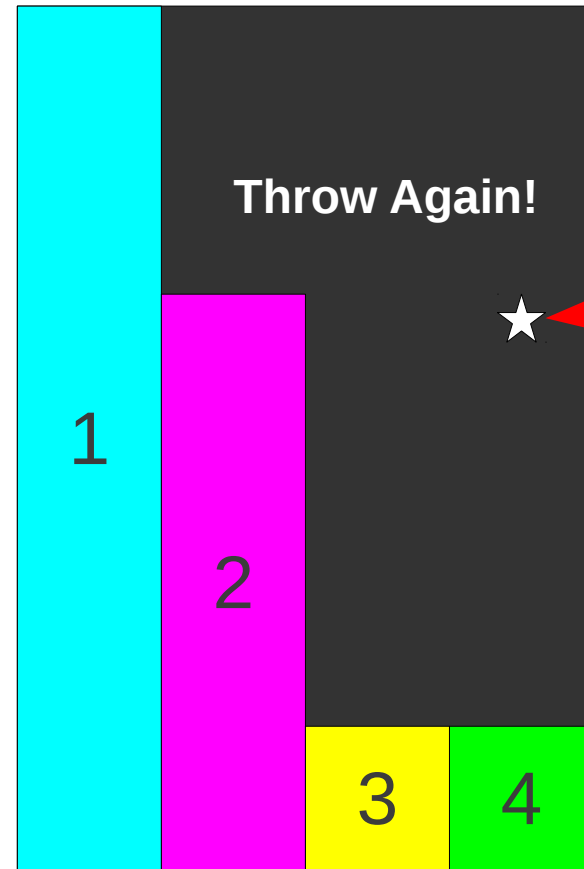


A Sample Loaded Die

How do we know what we hit?

- A four-sided die:

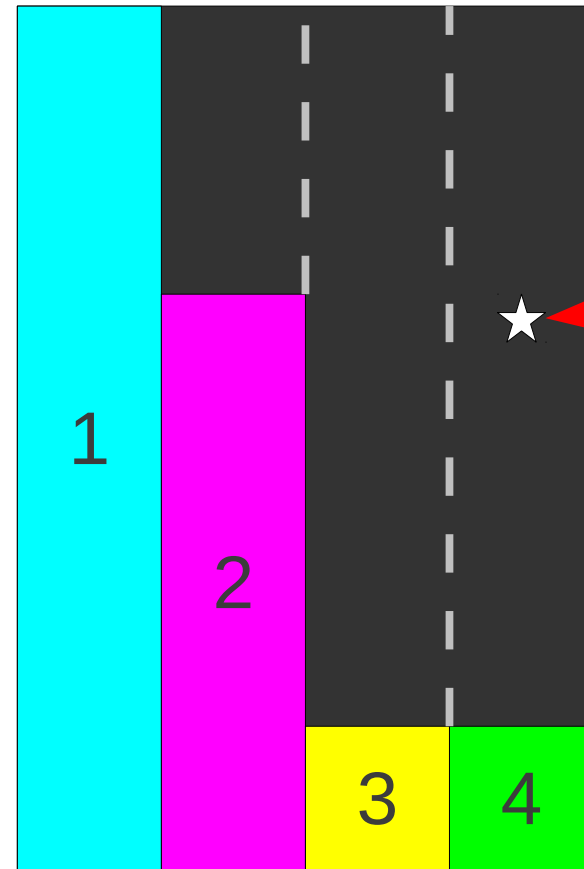
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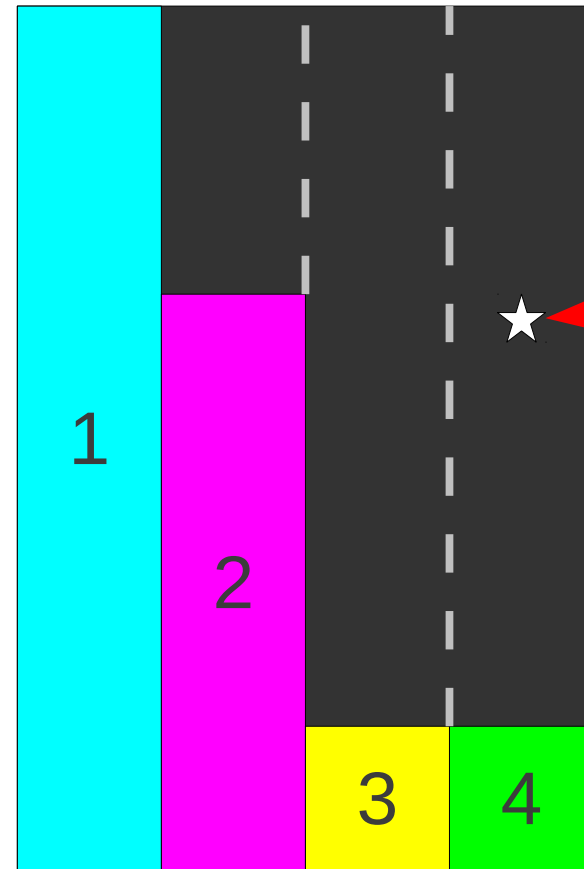


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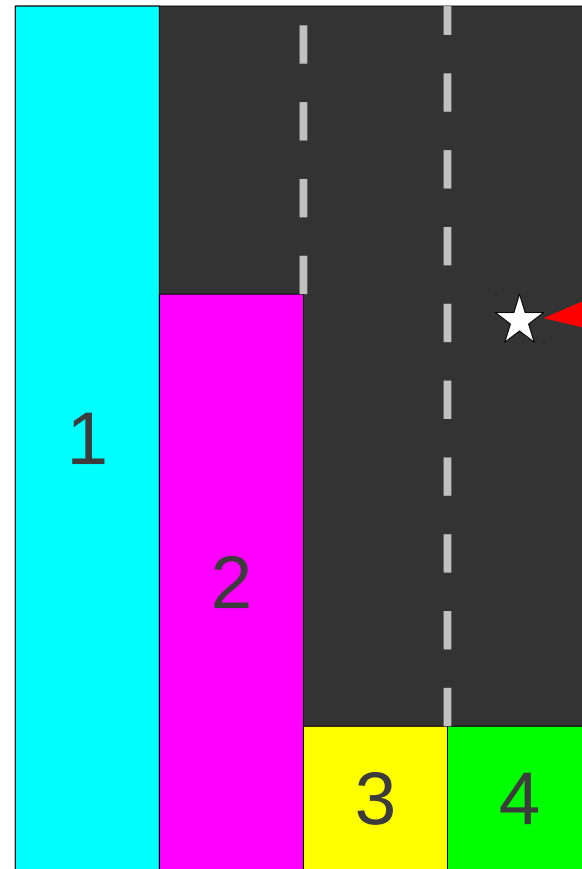
Each column has the same width.



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Choose the column by rolling a fair die.



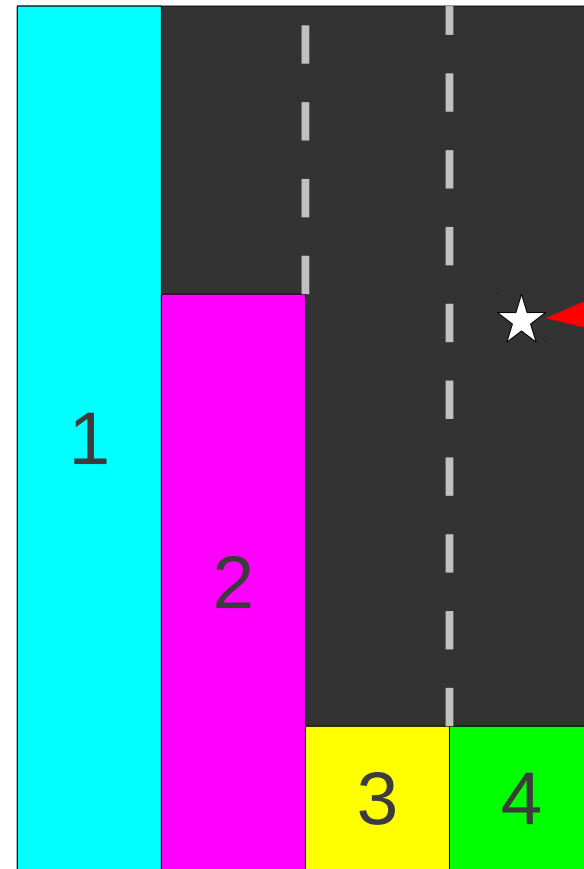
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Each column has only two options.



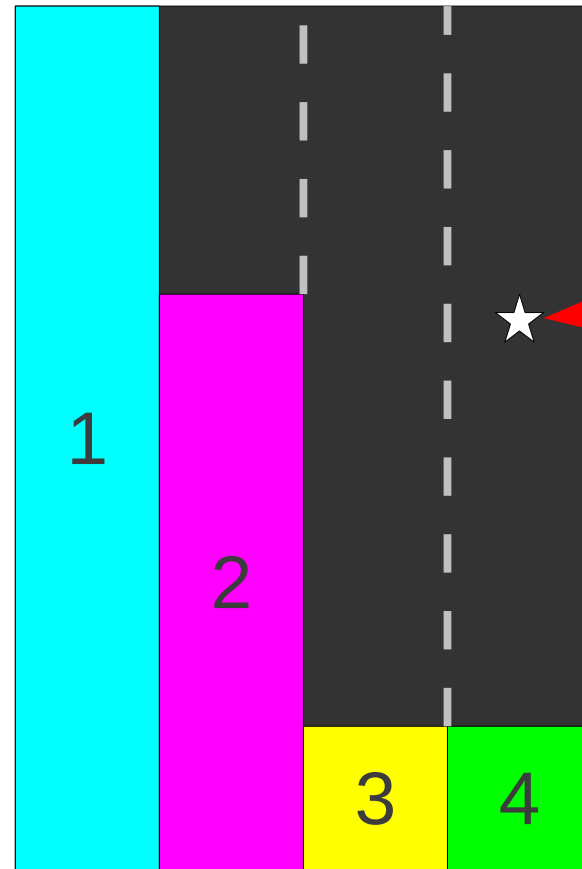
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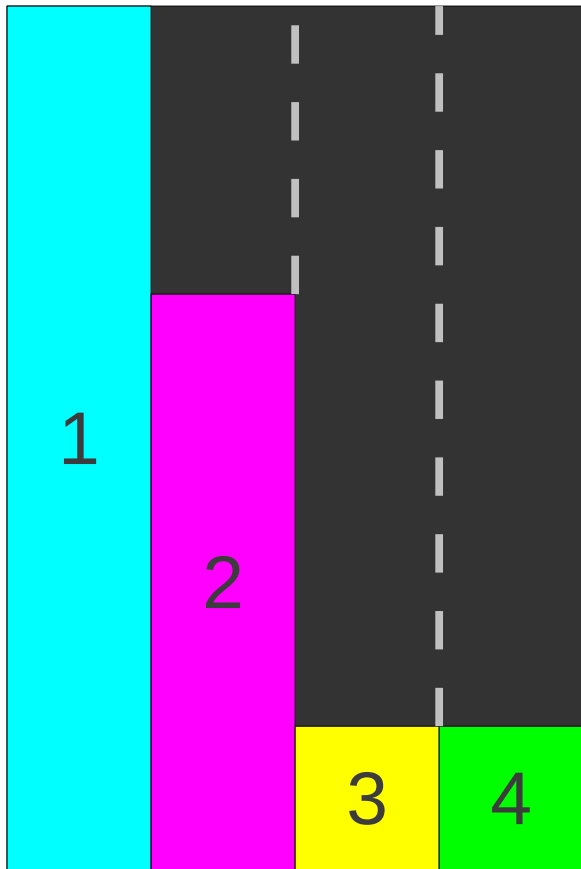
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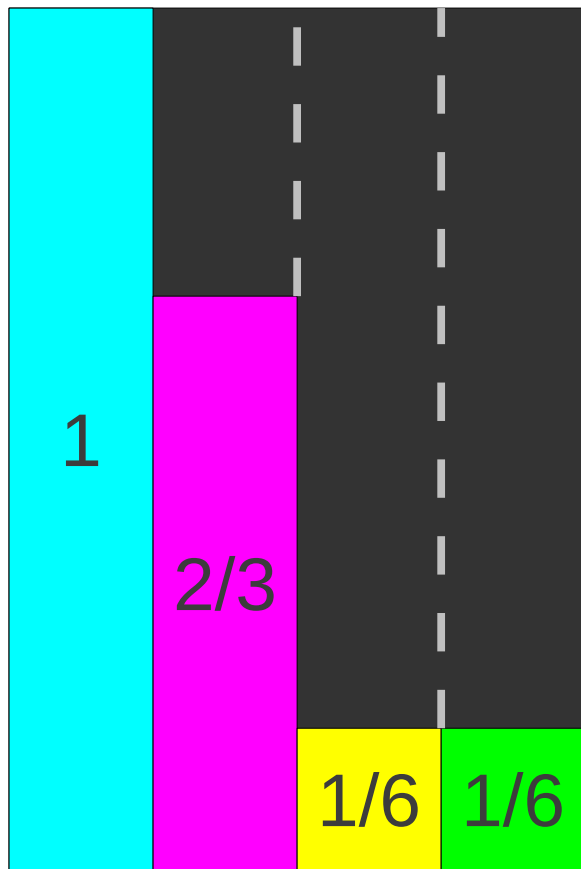
Choose the column by rolling a fair die.

Choose which part of the column by flipping a biased coin.



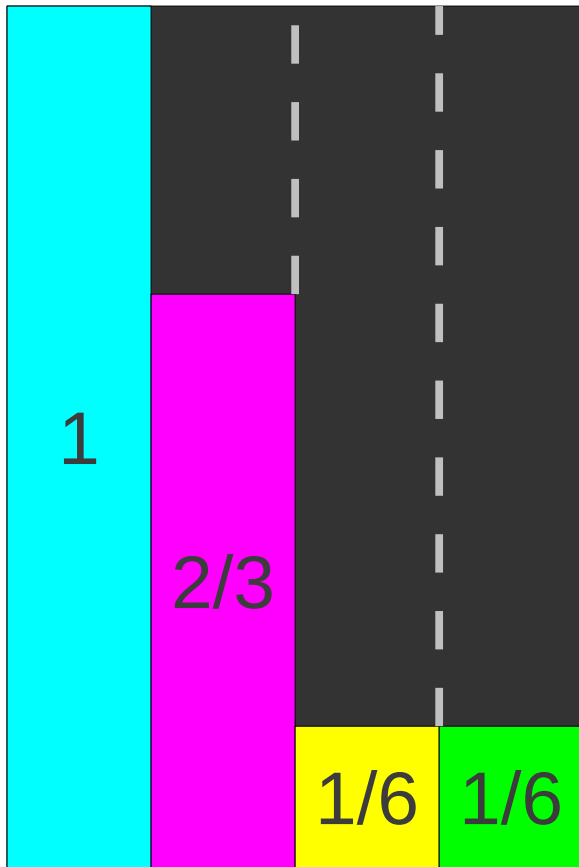


Throwing a dart at
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equivalent to rolling
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flipping one of
many biased coins.



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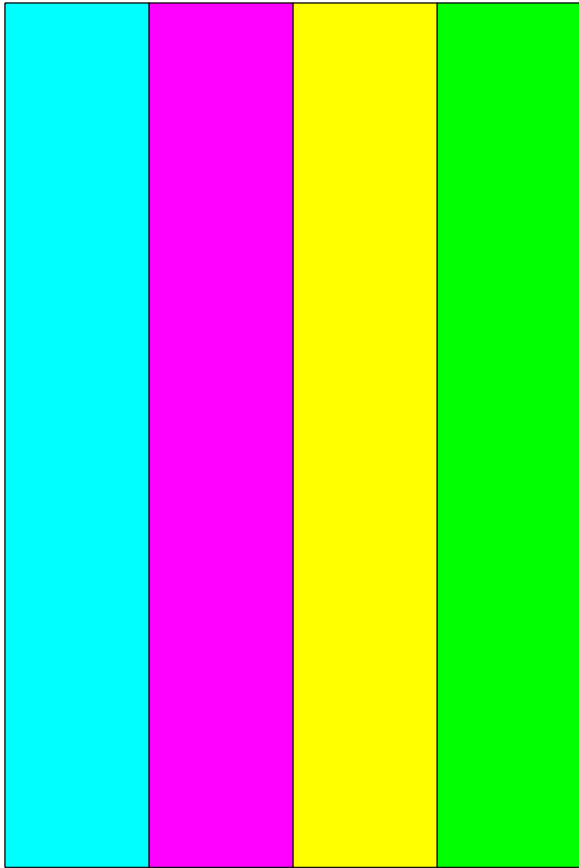
The Dartboard Algorithm



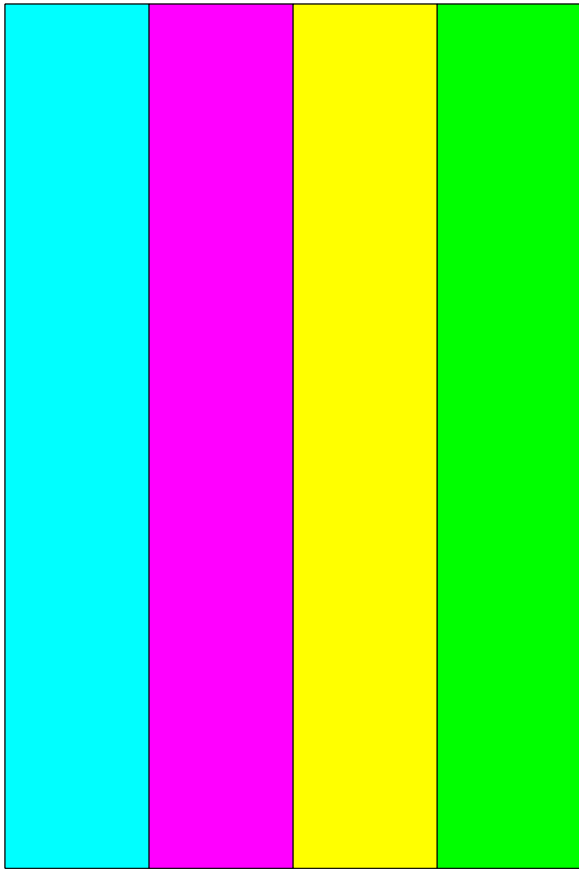
- Build the target by dividing all probabilities by the largest probability.
- Until you choose a side:
 - Roll a fair die to choose a column.
 - Flip the coin in that column.
 - If it's heads, output the column.

Not All Dartboards are Equal

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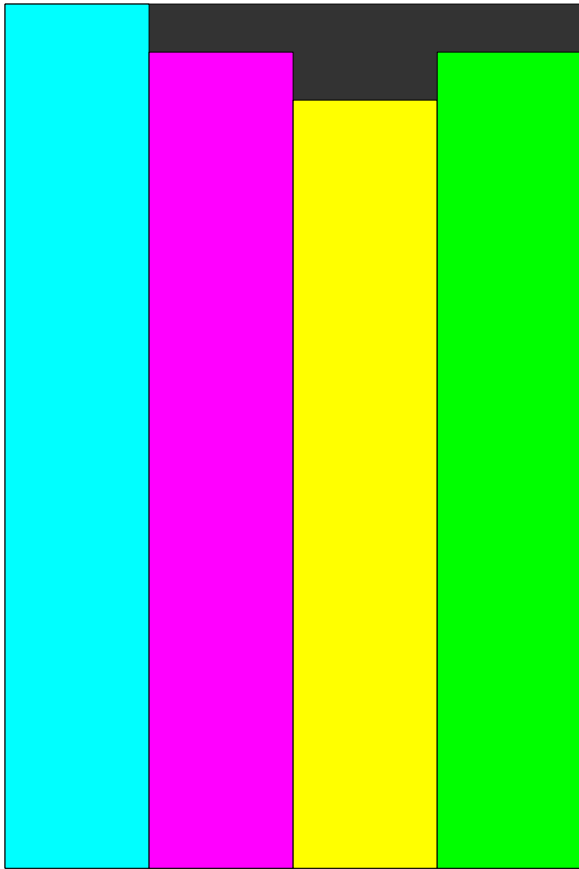


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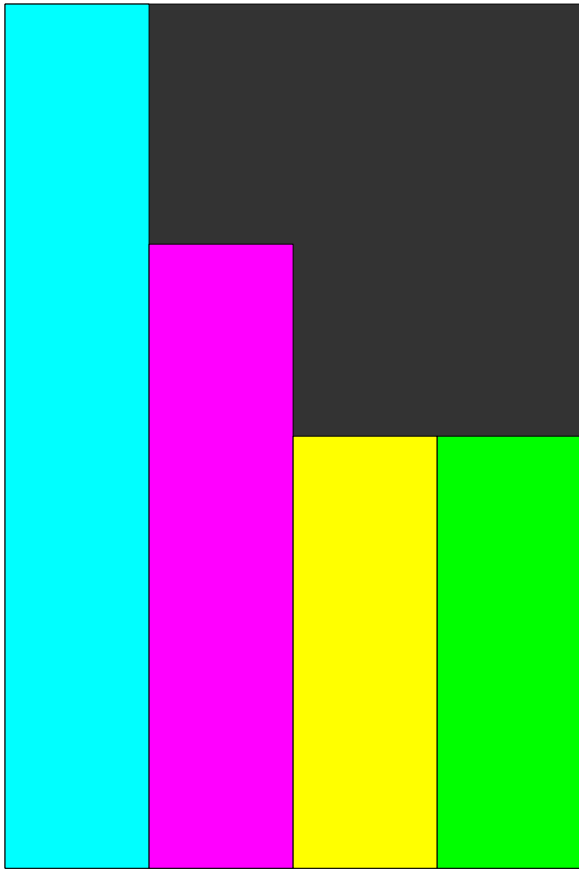
- If the die is close to being fair, the probability of missing is very low.

Not All Dartboards are Equal



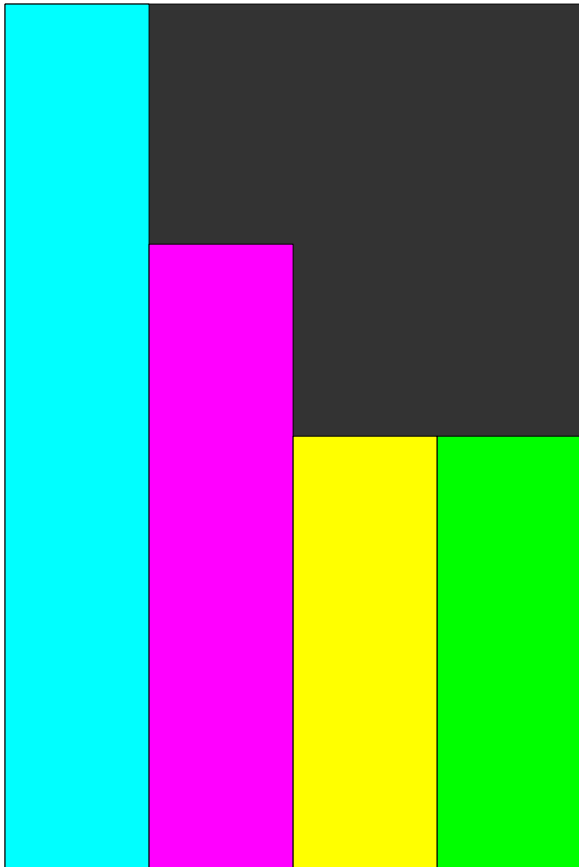
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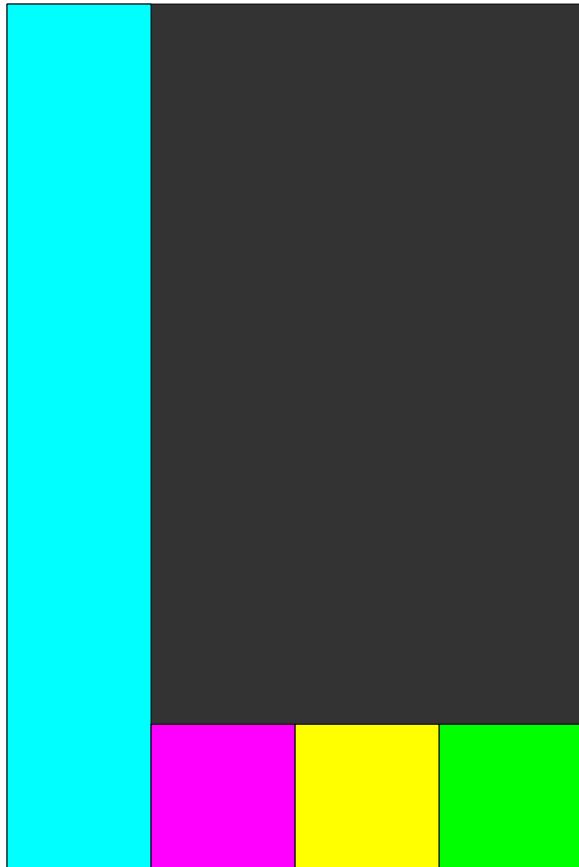
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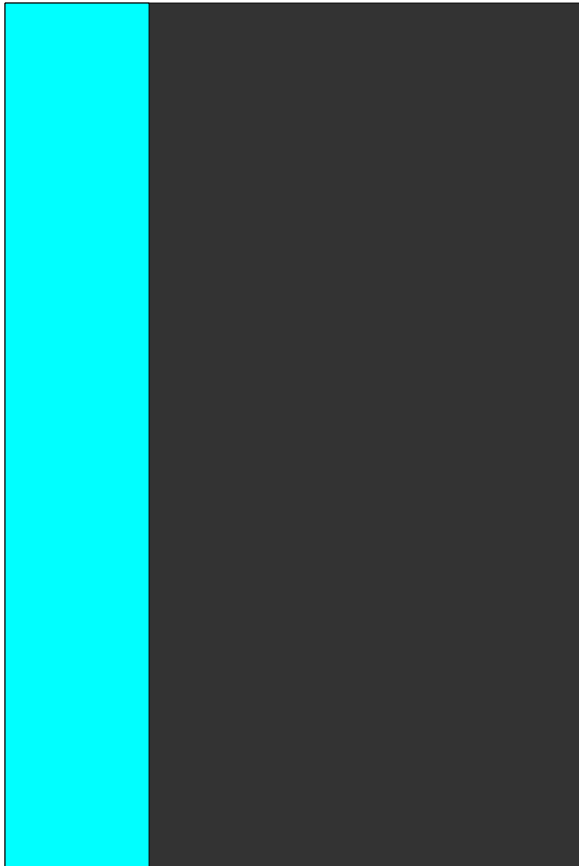
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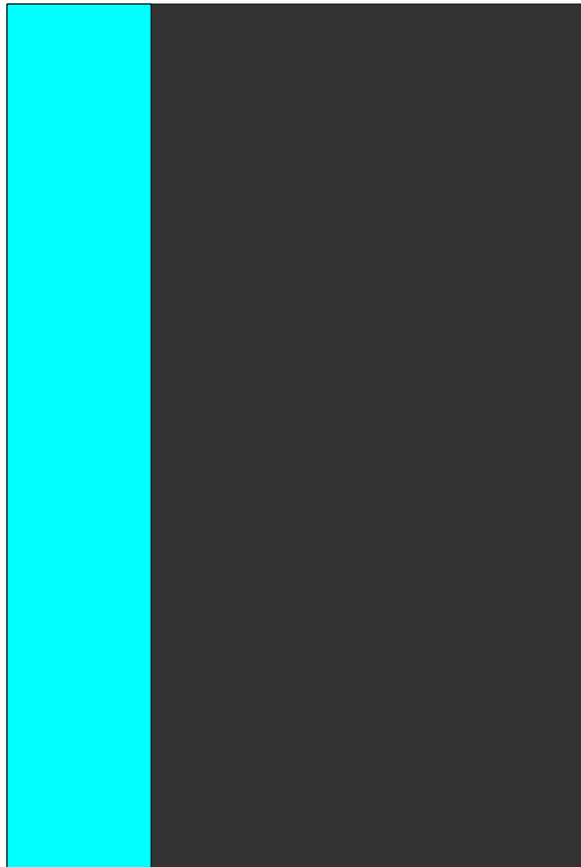
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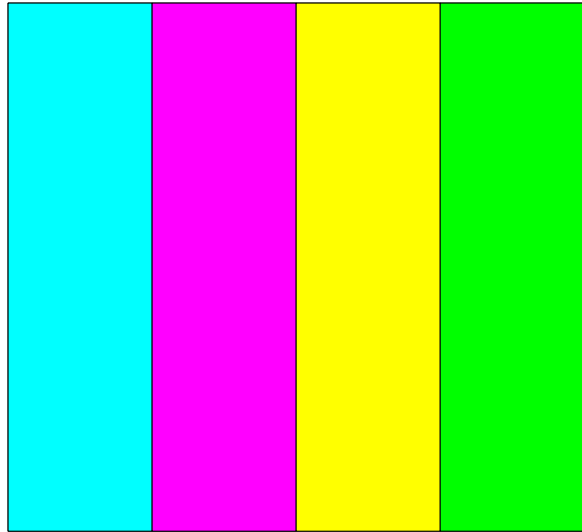
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Not All Dartboards are Equal



- If the die is close to being fair, the probability of missing is very low.
- As the die becomes more unfair, the probability of missing keeps increasing.
- In the limit, the dartboard might have $n - 1$ out of n columns always fail.

Not All Dartboards are Equal



- Perfectly fair die: $O(1)$ dart tosses required.
- Perfectly biased die: $O(n)$ dart tosses required on expectation.

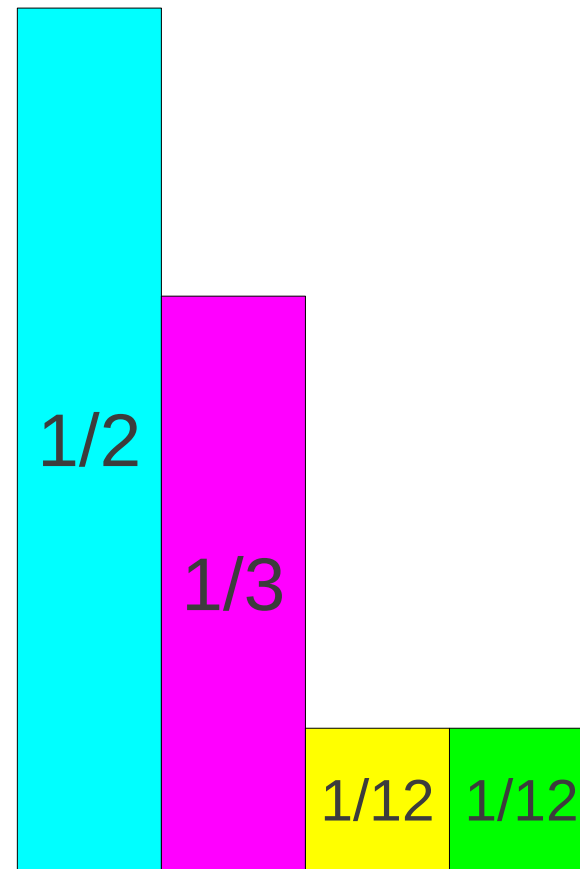


- General expected number of dart tosses: $O(n p_{\max})$

Can we get rid of the empty space?

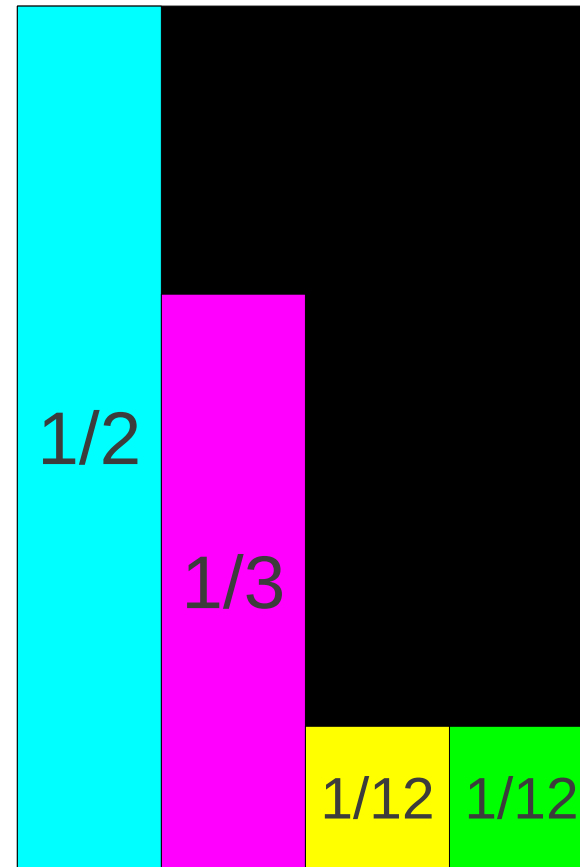
Getting Rid of Spaces

- A four-sided die:
 - $p_1 = 1/2$
 - $p_2 = 1/3$
 - $p_3 = 1/12$
 - $p_4 = 1/12$



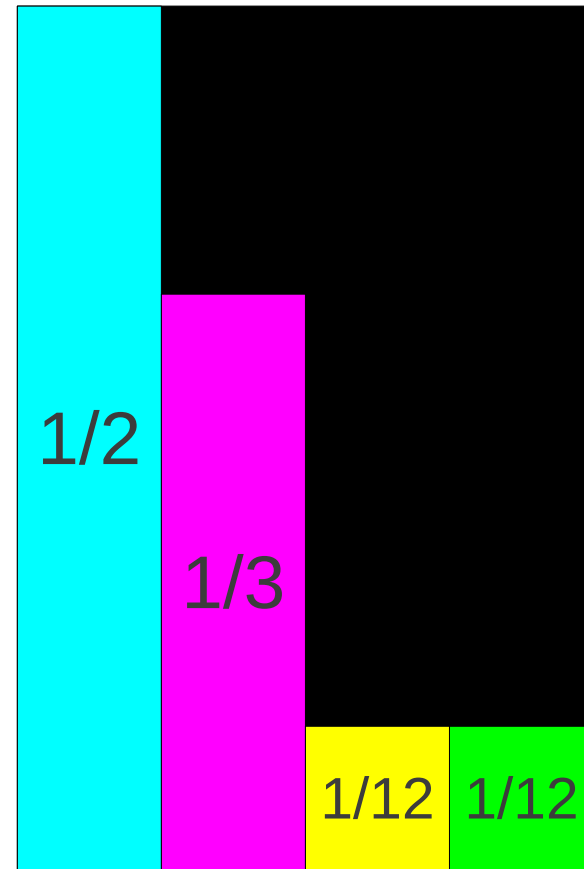
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Getting Rid of Spaces

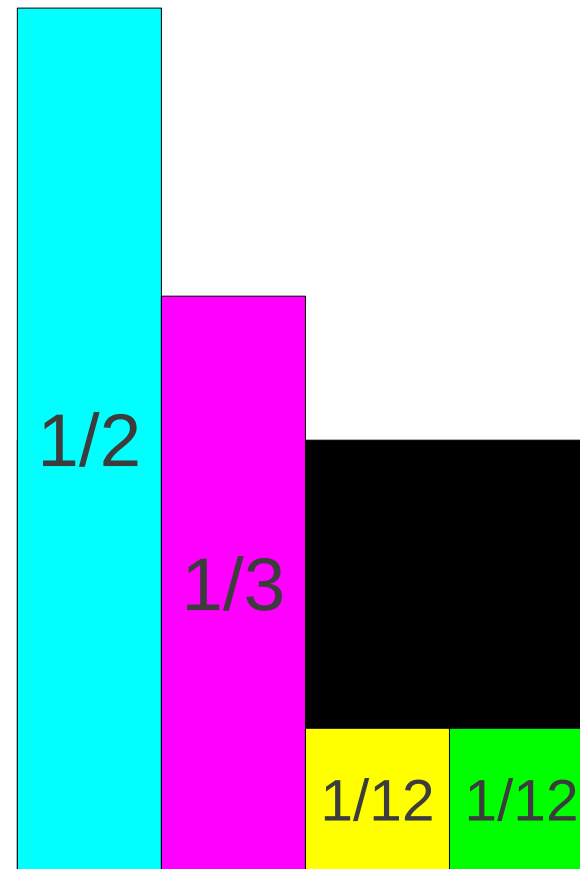
- A four-sided die:
 - $p_1 = 1/2$
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Height is $\frac{1}{2}$, the maximum of these values.

Getting Rid of Spaces

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Getting Rid of Spaces

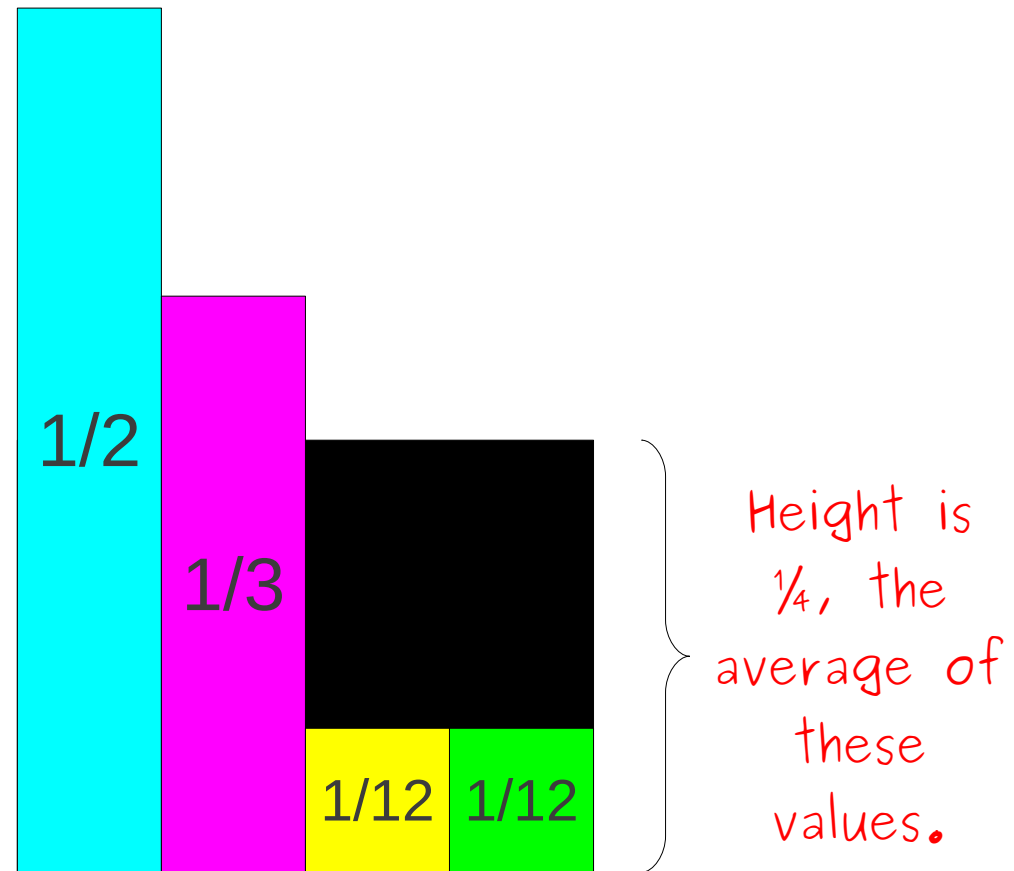
- A four-sided die:

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- $p_2 = 1/3$

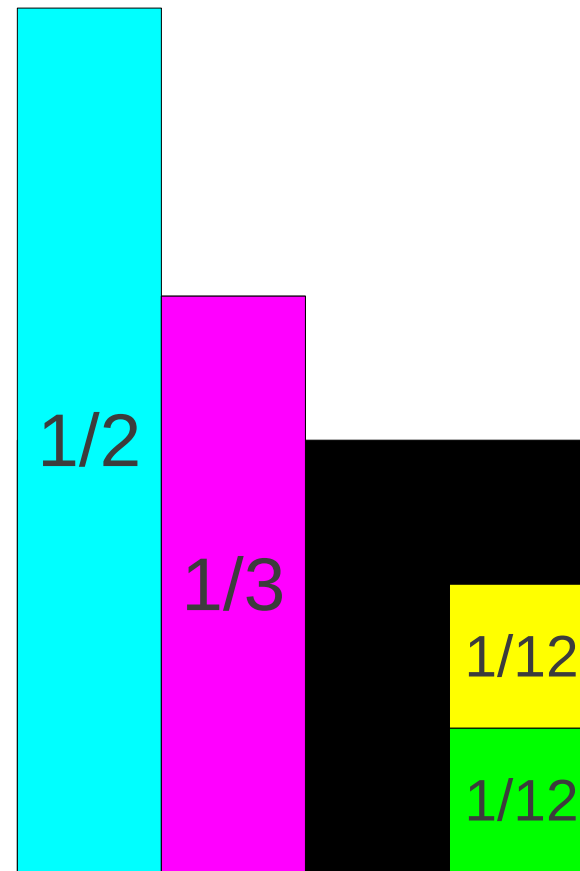
- $p_3 = 1/12$

- $p_4 = 1/12$



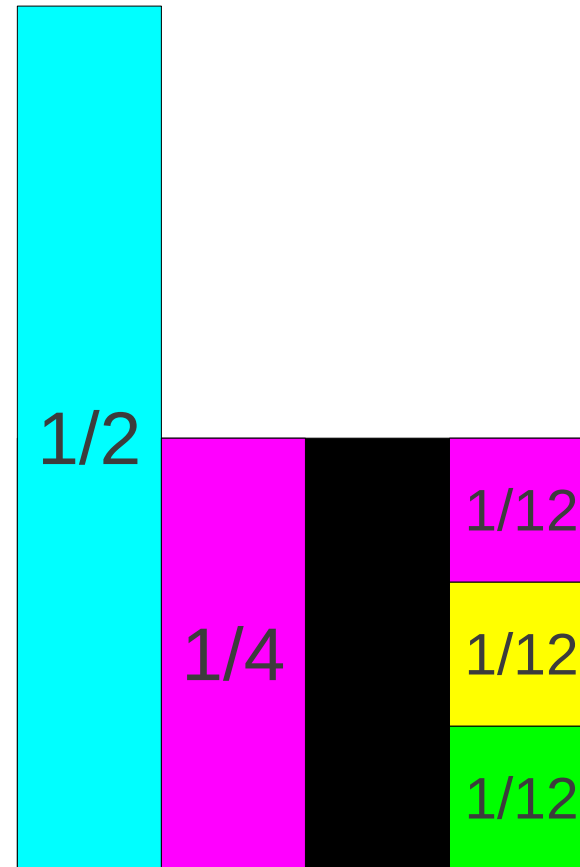
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- We have gotten rid of the blank spaces. Every dart tossed will hit something!



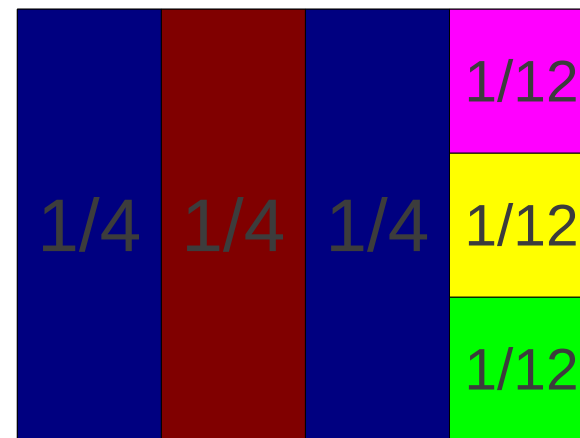
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- But now, each column isn't a biased coin.



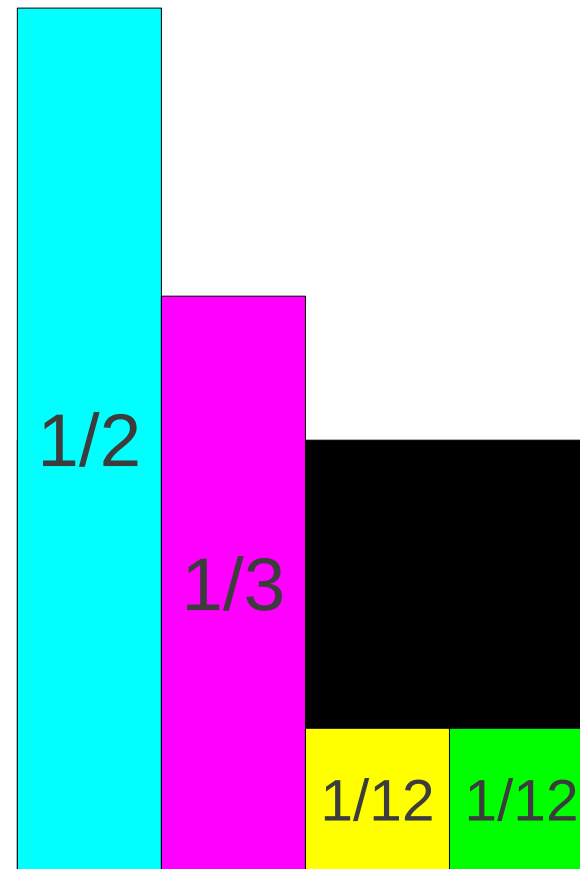
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Getting Rid of Spaces

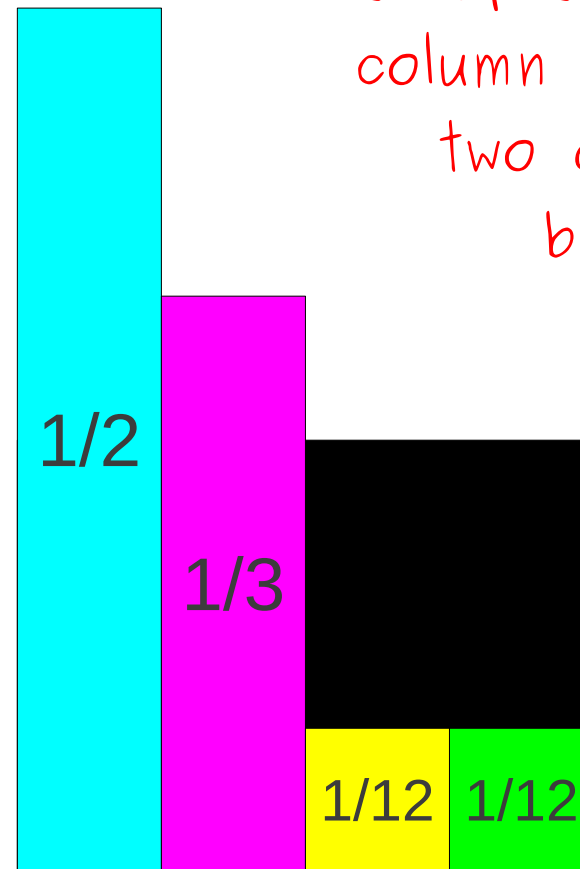
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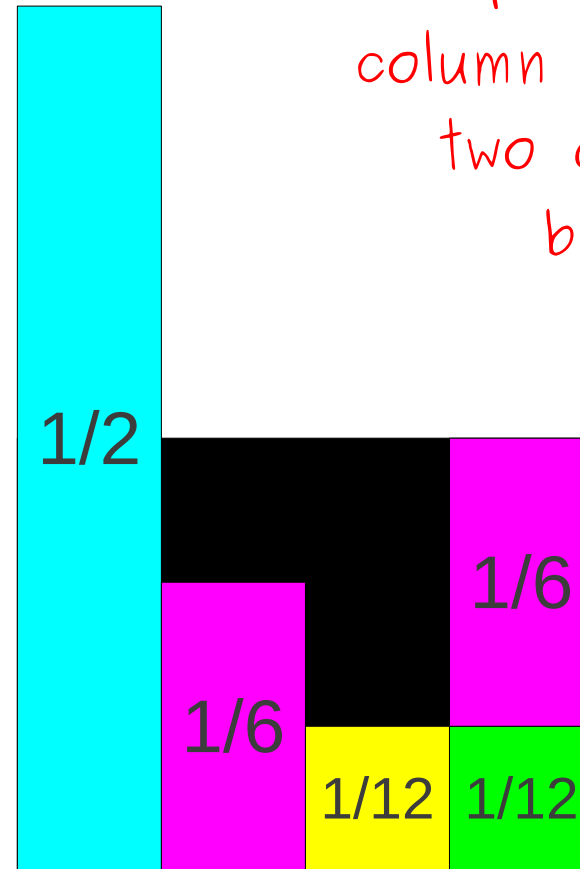
Goal: Reshape this setup so that each column has at most two different blocks.



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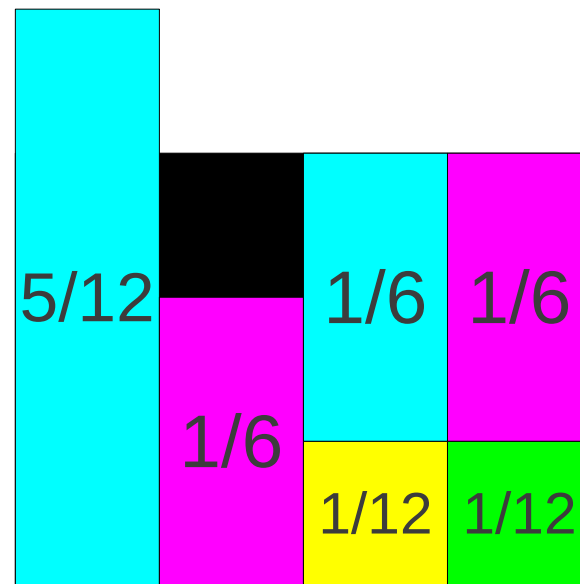
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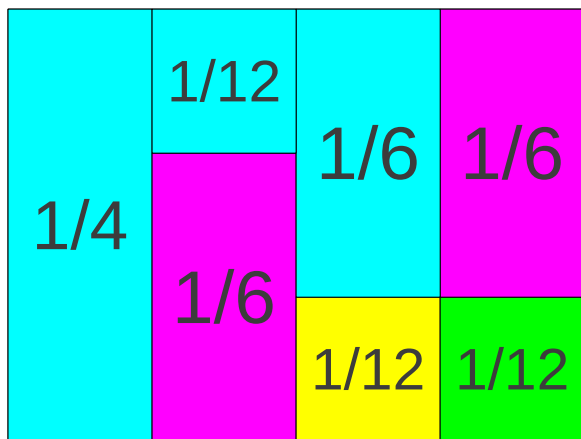


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 - $p_3 = 1/12$
 - $p_4 = 1/12$

Goal: Reshape this setup so that each column has at most two different blocks.

| | | | |
|-----|------|------|------|
| | 1/12 | 1/6 | 1/6 |
| 1/4 | 1/6 | 1/12 | 1/12 |



| | | | |
|---|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1 | $\frac{1}{3}$ | $\frac{2}{3}$ | $\frac{2}{3}$ |
| | $\frac{2}{3}$ | $\frac{1}{3}$ | $\frac{1}{3}$ |

We can choose the dart's x coordinate by rolling a fair die.

| | | | |
|---|-----|-----|-----|
| 1 | 1/3 | 2/3 | 2/3 |
| | 2/3 | 1/3 | 1/3 |

We can choose the dart's x coordinate by rolling a fair die.

We can choose the dart's y coordinate by flipping a biased coin.

| | | | |
|---|-----|-----|-----|
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| | 2/3 | 1/3 | 1/3 |

We can choose the dart's x coordinate by rolling a fair die.

We can choose the dart's y coordinate by flipping a biased coin.

If the coin yields heads, output the lower half as the answer.

| | | | |
|---|-----|-----|-----|
| 1 | 1/3 | 2/3 | 2/3 |
| | 2/3 | 1/3 | 1/3 |

We can choose the dart's x coordinate by rolling a fair die.

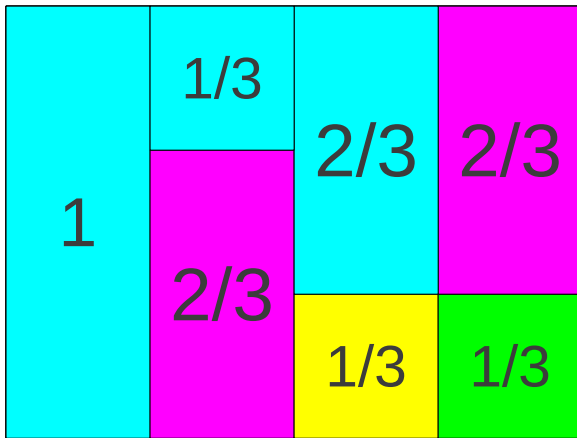
We can choose the dart's y coordinate by flipping a biased coin.

If the coin yields heads, output the lower half as the answer.

If the coin yields tails, output the upper half as the answer.

| | | | |
|---|-----|-----|-----|
| 1 | 1/3 | 2/3 | 2/3 |
| | 2/3 | 1/3 | 1/3 |

The Alias Method



- Distribute probabilities such that
 - Each column has height $1 / n$
 - Each column has at most two blocks in it.
- To generate a roll of the die:
 - Roll a fair die to choose the column.
 - Flip a biased coin to choose the upper or lower block.
- **Generation time is now $O(1)$.**

The Alias Method

| | | | |
|---|-----|-----|-----|
| 1 | 1/3 | 2/3 | 2/3 |
| | 2/3 | 1/3 | 1/3 |

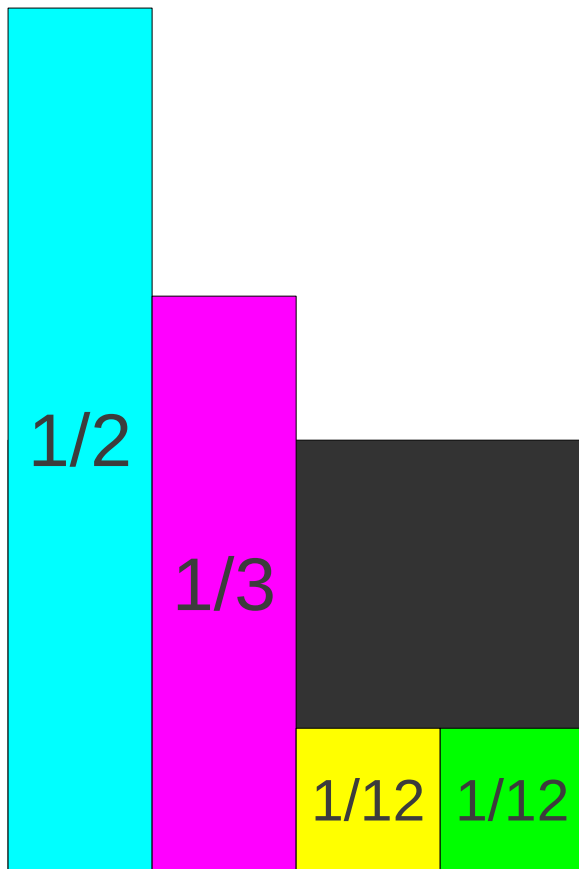
- For each column, have to store
 - The probability that of the coin for that column.
 - What true and false evaluate to.
- One column per side of the die.
- **Total space: $\Theta(n)$**

Building the Dartboard

Building the Dartboard

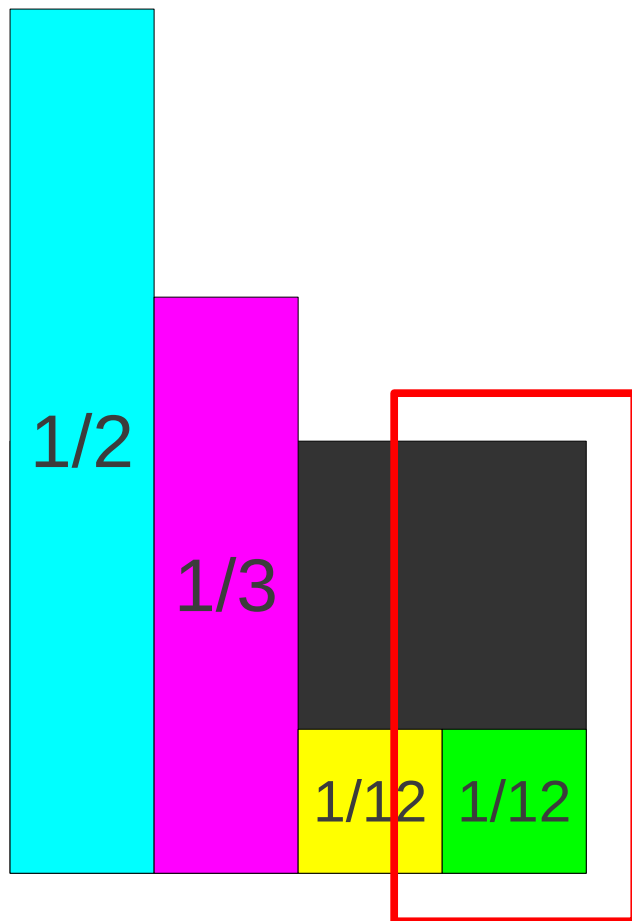
- Until no holes remain:
 - Find a column that has a hole.
 - Find a column that has some excess.
 - Move enough from the column with an excess into the column with a gap to fill it in.

Building the Dartboard



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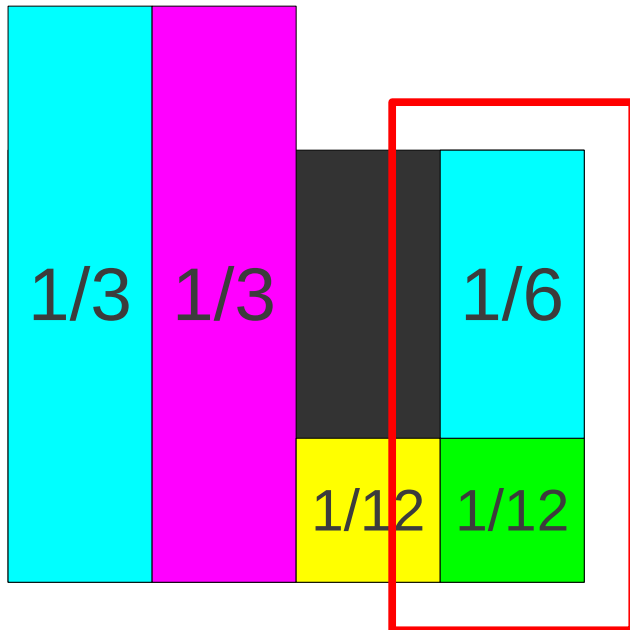
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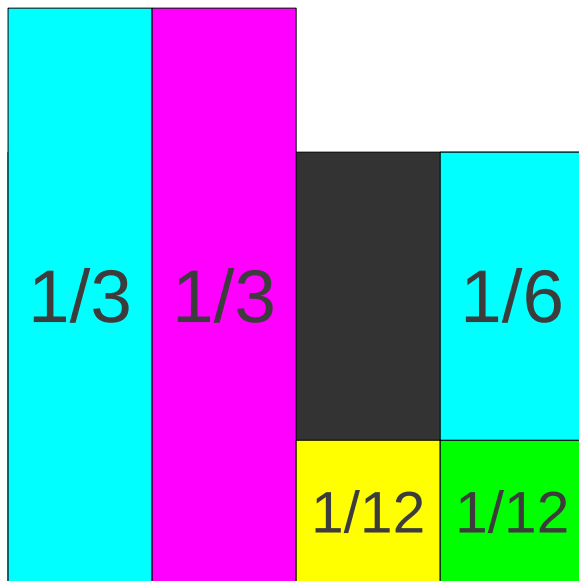
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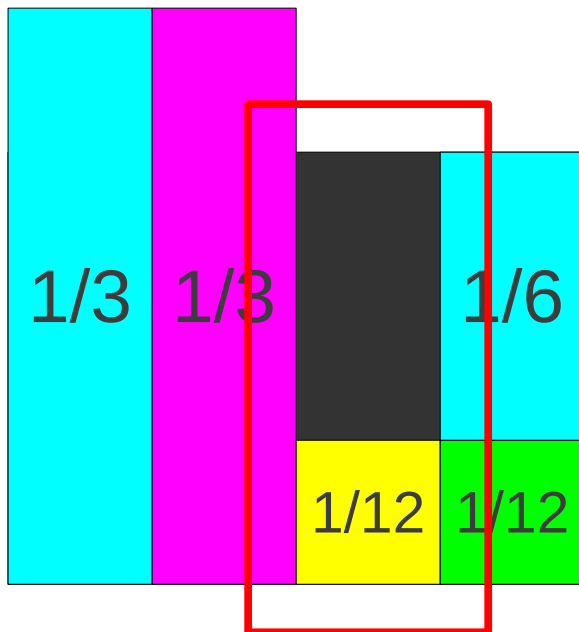
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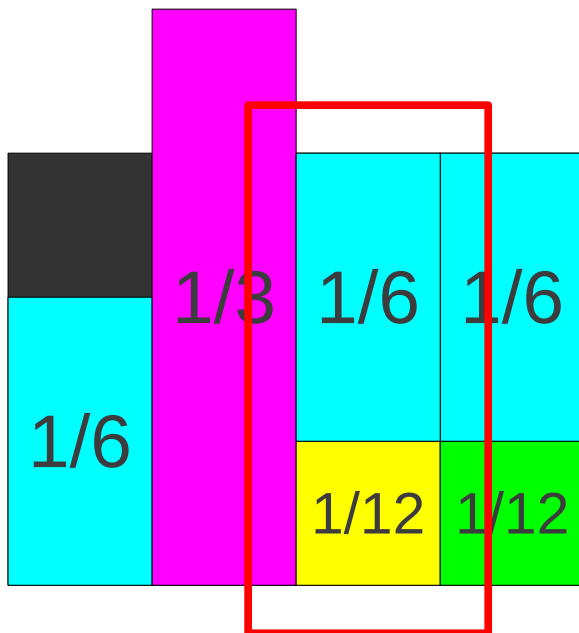
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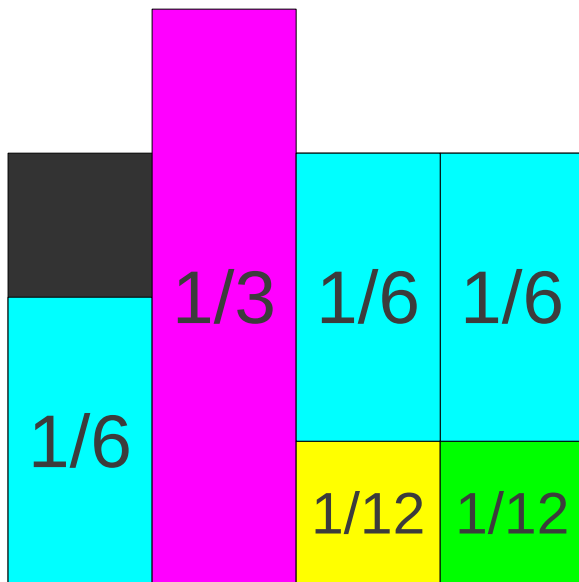
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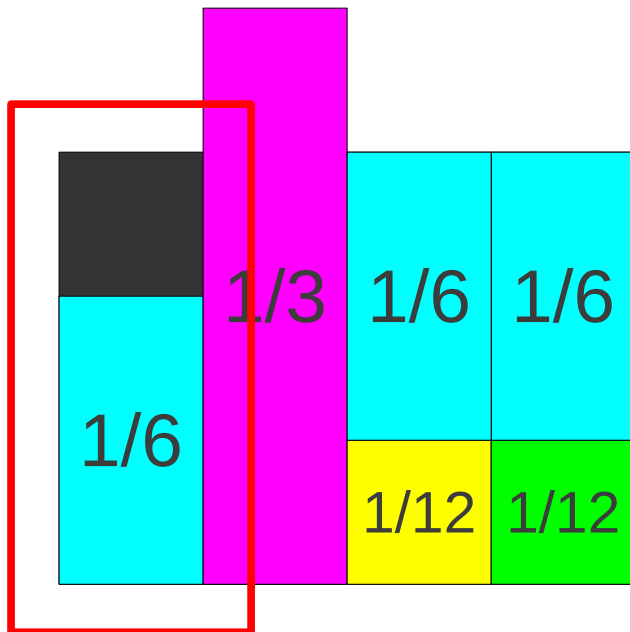
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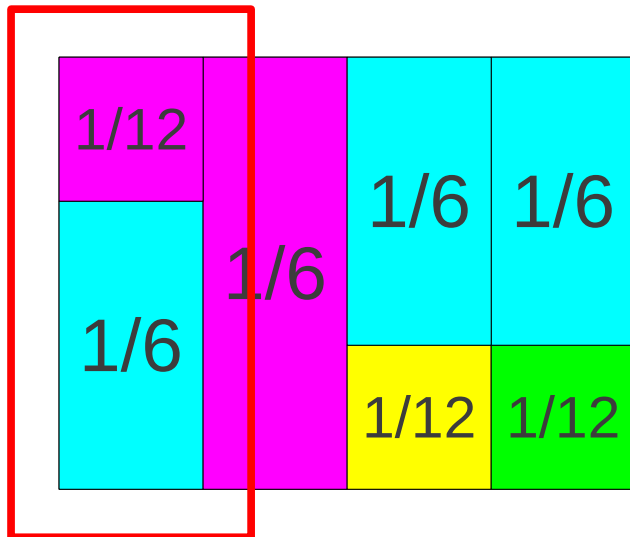
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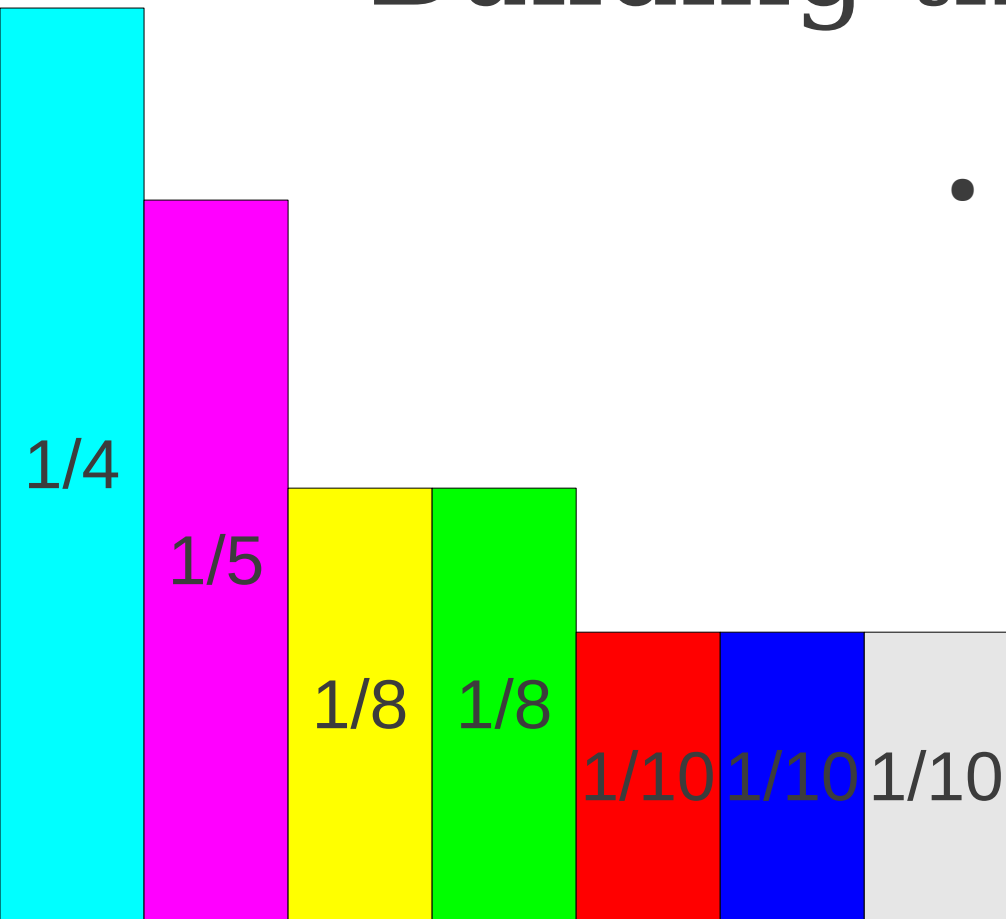


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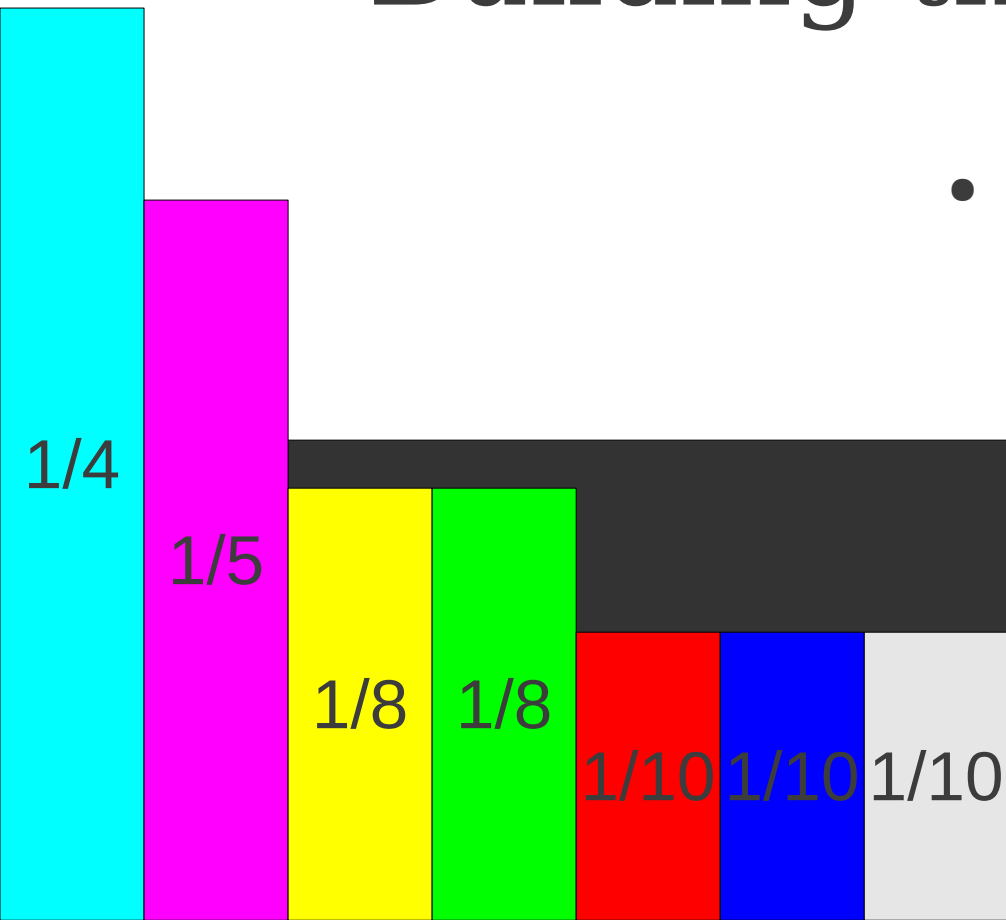


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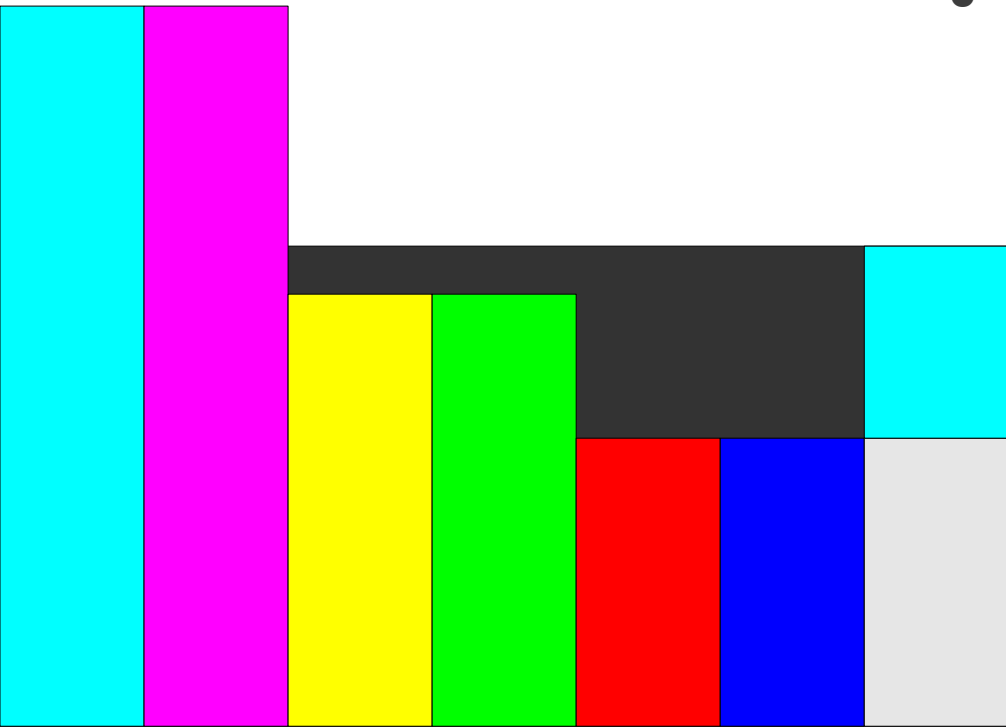
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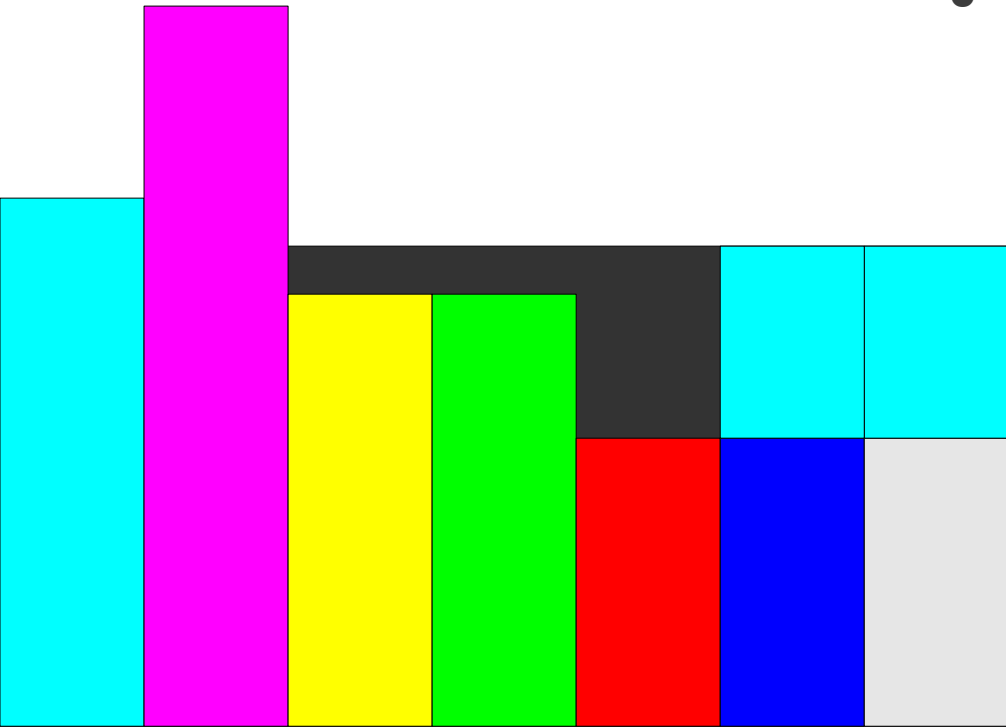
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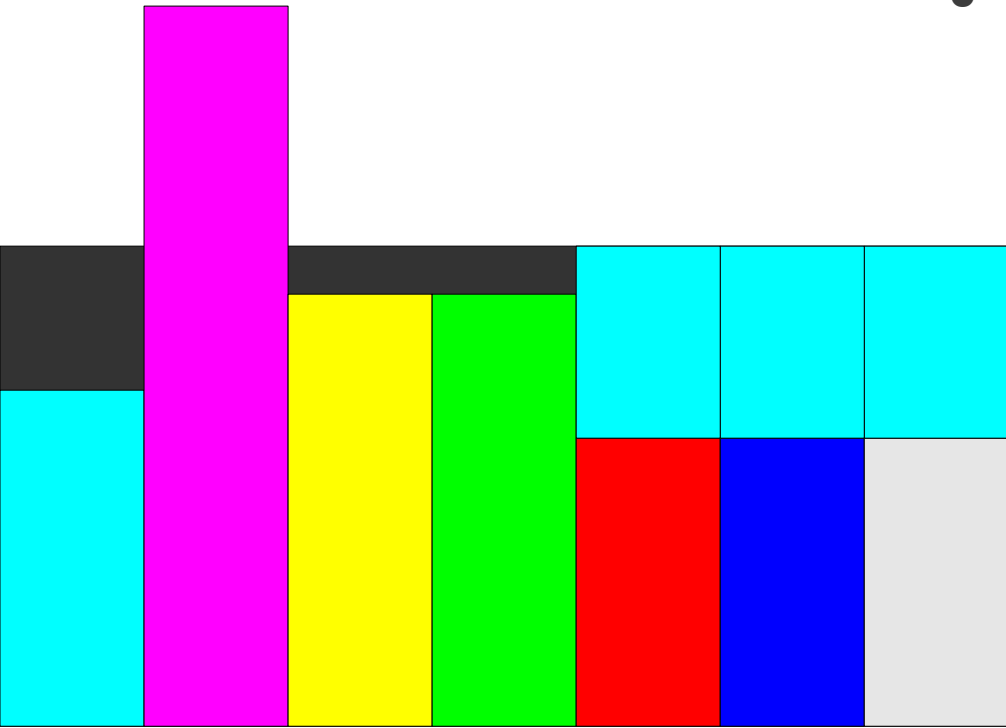
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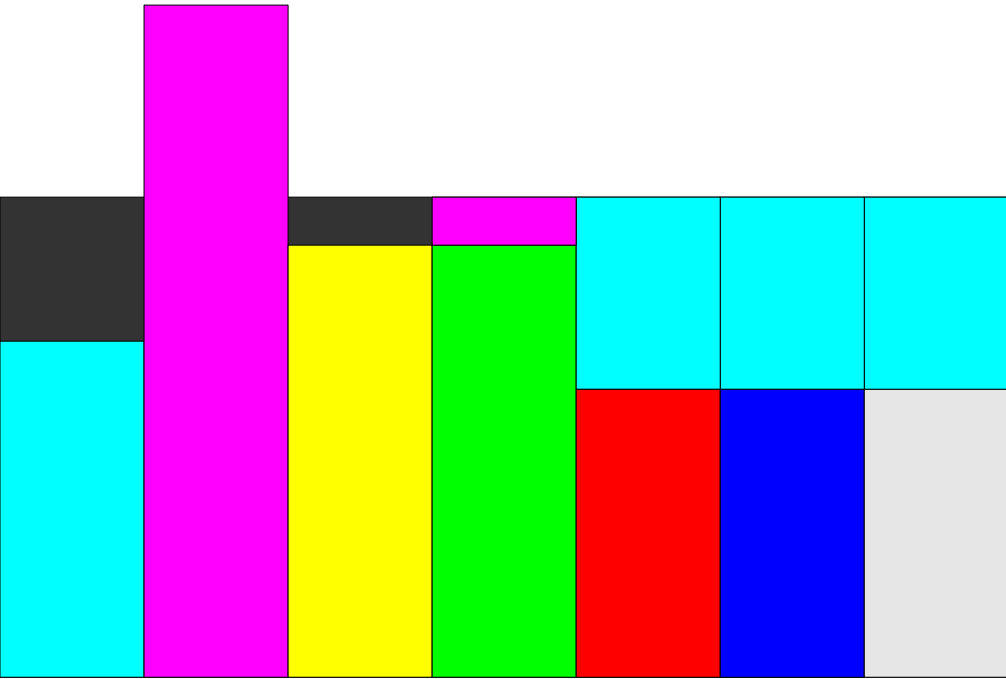
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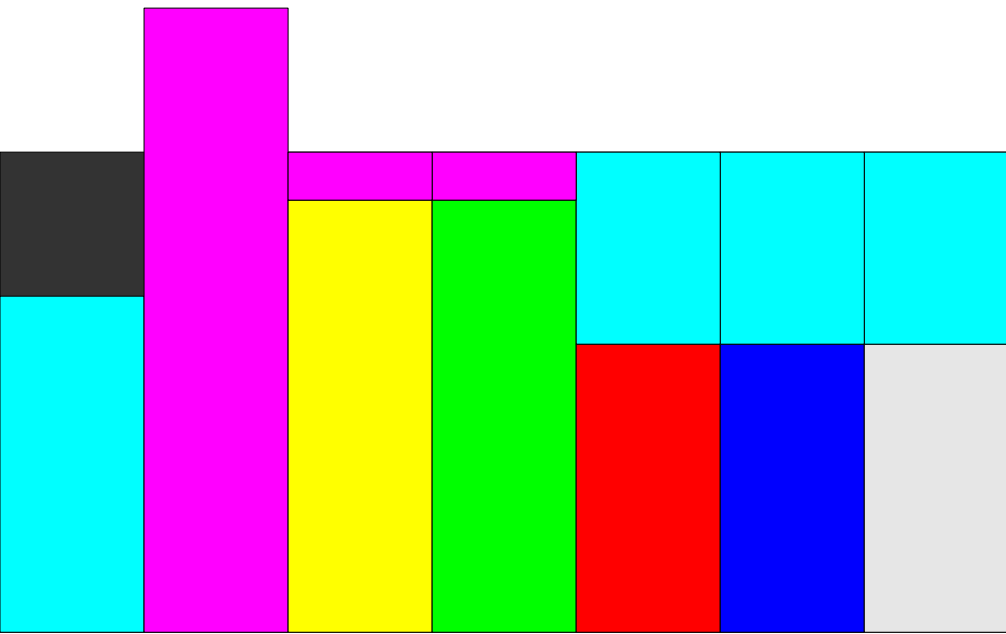
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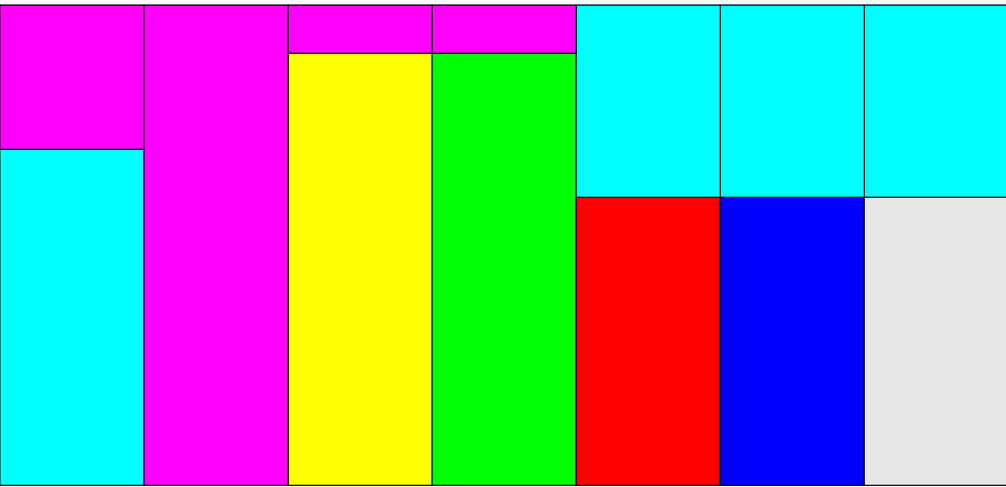
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Correctness Proof Sketch

- If not all columns are balanced:
 - Something must be too small.
 - Since the total probability just covers the dartboard, something must be too big as well.
 - Always possible to move probability from one column to another.
- Process eventually terminates:
 - Each iteration takes a column that wasn't balanced and balances it.
 - Eventually all columns become balanced.

Summary

- We can efficiently roll a fair die.
 - Gives an inefficient algorithm for loaded dice.
- We can efficiently flip a biased coin.
 - Generalizes to an efficient algorithm for loaded dice.
- We can reduce rolling a loaded die to rolling a fair die and flipping a biased coin.
 - Generalizes to an **extremely** efficient algorithm for loaded dice.

For More on These Algorithms

<http://www.keithschwarz.com/darts-dice-coins/>

Questions?