DRY CLEANING

Bet you can make a dry spot in two liquids!

THE SETUP
Put a tablespoonful of water on a china saucer. Color it if you wish with a few drops of food coloring. Pour a few drops of rubbing alcohol in the center of the water. Lo and behold, the water rushes away from the alcohol, leaving a dry spot in the center of the plate.

INSIDER INFORMATION
This stunt is a battle between the “skins” of two liquids. If you don’t believe that water has a skin, then watch the bag like drop form on a faucet. The shape of the drop is due to surface tension in the “skin,” where the water molecules cling together with quite remarkable strength. Alcohol also has a visible surface tension, but it is not as strong as that of water. On the shallow dish where the two surfaces meet, there is a tug-of-war between the surface tension of alcohol and the surface tension of water. Since the surface tension of water is stronger, it pulls away from the alcohol and destroys the weak surface film of the alcohol, leaving an empty and quite dry spot behind.