

Salt-Sized By Robert Lerosé

The tiny tardigrade, a slow-moving invertebrate also called a “water bear” or “moss piglet,” is found on every continent. Most live in land environments, in soils or on mosses and lichens. But they are aquatic creatures and need at least a thin film of water to be active. Without it, these super survivors dry up and their body processes nearly stop. Add moisture, and they become active again.

Tardigrades are as small as a grain of salt.

Tardigrades are nearly see-through! This one doesn't look transparent because the image was made by a special microscope, then colored so it would show up better.

A tubular organ in its mouth sucks fluids from tiny plants and animals.

It uses six of its eight legs to walk. The rear legs face backward and can grab things.

Without water, its puffy body folds itself into a dry form called a “tun.” It looks like a tiny raisin. In this protective state, it can survive big changes in oxygen levels, temperature, and air pressure—even the vacuum and radiation of space!

Disappearing Act

Try This: Put a sticker on the table. Cover it with a clear drinking glass that has a flat base and smooth sides. Walk around the table, and you can see the sticker through

the sides of the glass. Now pour in water to fill the glass. Where's the sticker?! You can see it from above, but from the sides, it seems to have moved or disappeared! Why? Think of your best answer, then read our explanation on page 38.

Now you see it...

