**What happens when marine biologists watch too many movies?**

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The western society refers to popular culture as “**Pop culture”**, a blanket term that includes music, art, literature, fashion, dance, film, internet culture, television and radio which is consumed by a majority of the population. Pop culture also significantly includes *meme culture* and internet *slang words* and abbreviations.

Though their jobs force them to spend days away from the land and human civilization, marine biologists, like all of us, are huge fans of pop culture. They love pop culture so much that when they discover a new species, the images from movies and television series flash in their brains and influence the nomenclature of the new species!

We are now going to learn about four new species named after pop culture icons.

**E.T. Sponge**

I don't know about you, but the climax of E.T makes me cry everytime I watch it. The 1982 Steven Spielberg blockbuster movie is about the unusual friendship about an alien and a (human) boy.

When scientists went on a deep sea expedition 7875 feet down in the eastern Pacific Ocean in the year 2020, they stumbled upon what they call “*Forest of the weird”*, where huge communities of pink coloured sponges were found.

Looking closely at the "face" of the sponge, the scientists quickly realised that the sponge resembles the face of E.T the alien. They have given the name *Advhera magnifica* according to scientific nomenclature, meaning "the magnificent alien". The common name for this is E.T. Sponge.

**Wakanda fish**

Read this sentence again and again and again, in full speed: "Wakanda fish is this?".... Does it begin sounding like "What kind of fish is this?"

That is exactly what the scientists were asking when they saw this fish in a twilight zone reef in the Indian ocean, off the coast of **Tanzania**, in 2019.

Coral reefs, as we all know, thrive extremely well in bright sunlight. But the twilight zone, the region of ocean below 200 m, is not fully blessed with the rays of the sun. The sunlight comes in pockets and mixes with the dark, creating the same amount of semi darkness that we see during dawn and dusk.

Scientists were really surprised to see a fully formed coral reef in the twilight region 260 m below the surface. Even more surprisingly, they also found a type of *fairy wrasse* fish which they have never seen before. Covered in specks of bright purple, the fish did not lose its colour even after preservation.

After careful observation, the scientists confirmed that it is a new species. Since the vibrant purple scales resemble the chain mail pattern of the Black Panther suit, they have named the fish *Cirrihablus wakanda,* in honour of the fictional world of *Wakanda* in Marvel Comics. The common name is given as *Vibranium fairy wrasse*. Those who read the comics (or have watched the movies) will understand the reference to Vibranium as well!

**Patrick Star**

All adults fondly remember the cartoons they grew up with. As scientists descended 3 kilometers below the sea surface in the north west Pacific Ocean, they came across seven armed *sea stars* in a pinkish shade.

Careful observations revealed that this undiscovered species is closely associated with the deep sea sponge and has a mutual connection to it.

Marine biologists fondly remembered how the cartoon character "Patrick the sea star" is the best friend of Sponge Bob Square pants. Based on the association with the deep sea sponge, the new species of sea star was named Patrick Star!

Cartoon fans around the world are waiting for more spongebob based characters to be discovered in the deep sea!

**Elvis Worm**

**Elvis Presley** is one of the most significant cultural and musical icons of the 20th century. The king of rock and roll, he is also well known for his shimmering stage costumes. Most of the disco costumes with sequins in the movies from 80s are inspired by him.

Thousands of meters underwater off the coast of California, deep sea *scale worms* glitter and sparkle just like Elvis and his legendary costumes. Bristles around the body also shine with full fiber optic effect, giving a disco effect! The glitter is believed to help the worms communicate, find prey or even defend against predators. The exact purpose is yet to be finalised.

The species has been named *Peinaleopolynoe elvisi*, after the legendary musician. The common name is **elvis worm**. When you look at the pictures, you can understand how the name is completely justified.

I am hoping for new fancy indian species to be named after pop culture icons.... imagine super strong insect species named "Shaktimaan beetle", or a sugar loving funky worm species called "Chota Bheem worm".

Sounds fun, doesn't it?!

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