

QUOTATION

OPERANT CONDITIONING IN POPULAR SCIENTIFIC WRITING

In *Where's My Jetpack?*, Daniel Wilson (Ph.D. in Robotics) discusses which contemporary technologies should be available as predicted through early 20th century science fiction writings. Although comical in tone, the book reports on the true current state of technology for such things as moon colonies, laser weapons, teleportation, etc. In the chapter on *Dolphin Trainer*, the author describes how scientists have used dolphins. In the following quote, he discusses the training process:

Convincing a dolphin to do your bidding for fun and profit is no easy task. Modern dolphin trainers persuade dolphins to play along by using good old *operant conditioning*. In this approach, every behavior of the dolphin is followed by a response from the trainer. Desired behavior is intermittently rewarded with either *primary reinforcement* (usually fish) or *secondary reinforcement* (such as a back rub). Because instant rewards are not always possible, a trainer will often whistle (called a *bridge*) when the dolphin is doing well. Undesired behavior is met with *nonreinforcement*, in which the trainer completely ignores the dolphin and may even leave the dock. When dolphins are unhappy with trainers, they also employ nonreinforcement and sometimes swim away. The trainer must take care not to become the trained. (pp. 69–70)

REFERENCE

Wilson., Daniel, H. (2007). *Where's my jetpack? A guide to the amazing science fiction future that never arrived*. New York: Bloomsbury USA.

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