



DON'T PANIC!

HHGTTG Team Roles of Major Characters

"Don't Panic". This is the sage advice printed in large friendly letters upon that "wholly remarkable book", The Hitchhikers Guide To The Galaxy (THHGTTG).

The book itself is a significant character within the sci-fi comedy works of Douglas Adams, but our quest in this exploration is to see which of the other characters may live up to this advice.

THHGTTG was initially a trilogy (of four books), then a radio series, a BBC TV series and most recently a big screen film version in 2005. The main characters, like their genius creator (not hard to peg him as a Plant), are mostly bright and quirky in some way.

The series used unorthodox and far flung settings along with the behavioural archetypes of the characters to shine an ingenious and satirical light upon contemporary issues.

The major characters of Arthur Dent, Ford Prefect, Zaphod Beeblebrox, Trillian and Marvin the Paranoid Android also make for an unusual team.

The team is often biased by the thinking power and charisma of some of the more flamboyant characters. This often leads to opportunistic adventurism being the norm and the considered risk analysis and forethought often advocated by other characters being sidelined.

A host of other folks such as Slartibartfast and Prostetnic Vogon Jeltz (and many more) add further colour as the story unfolds.

So what behavioural "Team Role" types from Belbin might flavor the team and leadership styles of our favourite HHGTTG characters?

DISCLAIMER: For the truly "die hard" Adams fans, apologies in advance that we have based our thoughts on a general amalgam of each character's traits across radio, book, series and film versions (arguably some act slightly differently in each version).

In brief:

Arthur Dent (ME / IMP / TW)

Ford Prefect (PL, RI, CO)

Zaphod Beeblebrox (RI, SH, PL)

Trillian (PL / SP / CO / ME)

Marvin (ME / SP / IMP)

Slartibartfast (PL / SP / CF / TW)

Prostetnic Vogon Jeltz (IMP / SH / CF)

Why we thought this:**Arthur Dent (ME / IMP / TW)**

Poor Arthur is the hero you have when you are not quite having a hero. He was rescued by Ford Prefect just before Earth Mark 1 was destroyed, then dragged on an intergalactic journey, whether he was ready for it or not.

The character is easy to relate to, mostly follows the courses of action that have been set in motion by others and generally goes with the flow not seeking out heroic acts himself, but occasionally having them thrust upon him. Not a lot of SH or CO it would seem?

His sober and often detached cynicism contrasts with the reckless optimism and enthusiasm of other main characters as he is swept along in a series of adventures (somewhat against his will).

Possible Top Roles: Monitor Evaluator (sober, analytical, cynical, highly aware of the problems and risks), Implementer (generally methodical, reliable and dependable to tag along, but not really fond of change), Team Worker (mostly courteous and mild, avoids conflict, able to fit in with and work with difficult and odd people for extended periods).

Ford Prefect (PL, RI, CO)

Ford is a field reporter for the THHGTTG and is from a small planet in the vicinity of Betelgeuse. Has been stranded on Earth for 15 years and befriends and saves Arthur.

Always looking for a good time and more likely to choose going to a party over saving a planet, he's an opportunist and an adventurous Hitchhiker through space and time.

Clever and a little unorthodox, extroverted and able to remain calm under pressure (or at least pretend to be), he tries to be a good guide and mentor to Arthur but doesn't always reliably follow through on this.

Often getting himself into and out of trouble with his fast thinking and fast-talking. He has also been described by some as basically a "bad version of Dr Who" (Douglas Adams actually wrote for the Dr Who series before creating HHGTTG).

Possible Top Roles: Plant (creative, imaginative and a little quirky), Resource Investigator (opportunistic, outgoing, fast talking, pursues what interests him, adaptable, makes the best of any situation, mostly good with people but not great at follow through), Coordinator (adept at getting others to help him, manipulating people and situations).

Zaphod Beeblebrox (RI, SH, PL)

The infamous and self-promoting two-headed President of The Galaxy. He is also the inventor of the Pan Galactic Gargleblaster (the best drink in the galaxy) and winner of the "Worst Dressed Sentient Being in the known universe" competition.

The centre of attention and the life of the party but could just as easily get you all locked up in prison. Became two-headed as he simply could not become President with a whole brain.

Can appear calm and in control, but is barely concealing a load of anxious and impulsive energy. Clever and imaginative yet often irresponsible and unreliable, he always seems to be involved in numerous schemes.

Possible Top Roles: Resource Investigator (entrepreneurial, persuasive, fast talking, charismatic and pursues his interests), Shaper (anxious energy, driven, competitive, volatile), Plant (clever and quirky), Coordinator (delegates to others but can be quite manipulative).

ADDITIONAL: What about Zaphod's second head?

Zaphod remarked to Ford that "certain aspects of my personality were not exactly Presidential", so the 2nd head into which he loaded those parts of his brain tends to have the same Roles, but is just not managing the weaknesses as well and is thus a touch more volatile and unpredictable.

Trillian (PL / SP / CO / ME)

Formerly Tricia McMillan of Earth, Trillian is described in the book as "beautiful, charming, and devastatingly intelligent".

Snatched from a party on Earth by Zaphod after Arthur completely blew it with her, she finally gets to do something interesting with her degrees in mathematics and astrophysics.

She seems to be the only one who knows best how to manage the stolen spaceship 'The Heart of Gold' and its "Infinite Improbability Drive". Arguably she is the smartest of the team.

She also possesses good people skills and an ability to remain calm whilst offering the voice of reason amongst some more impulsive characters.

Possible Top Roles: Plant (clever, innovative and intellectually curious), Specialist (font of knowledge and seeks to acquire greater technical knowledge), Monitor Evaluator (analytical and seeks clarity in plans and courses of action, seeks to stop ill-considered actions), Coordinator (calm and considered manager of people).

Marvin (ME / SP / IMP)

The "Paranoid Android" is a robot designed to have a "genuine people personality", but he also suffers from being manically depressed and is painted as somewhat the pessimist (or a realist depending upon how you might look at it?).

Arthur calls him a "walking sulking machine".

A repository of knowledge and possessing a "brain the size of a planet" he is quite the deep thinker, but owing to his programming he is also quite a loyal and hard worker.

He can be quite blunt and factual when telling the team what they don't want to hear, but probably very much need to hear. Often over ruled and over talked by the "flashier" and louder team members.

Possible Top Roles: Monitor Evaluator (factual and blunt advising of the situation and in-depth analysis at any given time), Specialist (walking encyclopedia of facts and knowledge), Implementer (will do the dirty work when required for the team albeit grudgingly).

Slartibartfast (PL / SP / CF)

This peculiar old Magarathan planet designer is the one who tries to set Arthur straight on the true history of the Earth (built and paid for by the Mice who are actually hyper-intelligent pan dimensional beings to find the question that will explain the enigmatic answer to the ultimate question of life the universe and everything).

He also introduces Arthur to the actual answer to the ultimate question of life the universe and everything offered by “Deep Thought” (which as we know is 42) and the unfolding drama of Earth Mark2.

A clever, quirky and highly skilled professional in his field who likes doing the “fiddly bits around the coastlines” and is also keen to impart his knowledge to Arthur.

Possible Top Roles: Plant (he “designs” planets), Specialist (planet design and building is quite a rare field of expertise, and he is quite proud of it and willingly shares this knowledge), Completer Finisher (he revels in the detailed and fiddly bits such as the Fjords of Norway for which he won an award). A bit of Teamworker also we suspect, as he’s quite a kind chap in his own way?

Prostetnic Vogon Jeltz (IMP / SH / CF)

All stories need some bad guys, although the Vogons are not bad guys in the typical sense, merely bad tempered, stubborn and bureaucratic.

As Ford says they just “run things” and are big fans of rules and adherence to rules. They can also be quite belligerent and obstructive whether spouting bad poetry or destroying people’s planets to make way for hyperspace bypasses.

This leading Vogon is a particular stickler for the rules and has a low tolerance indeed for anyone who tries to bend or break them.

Possible Top Roles: Implementer (able to reliably work within and enforce compliance with existing systems, inflexible to deviation from the systems), Shaper (focused on and driven towards the mission, and easily provoked when things don’t go as required), Completer Finisher (will definitely see things through to the bitter end to his high standards).

Note: Mr L Prosser, the human leading the push to knock down Arthur’s old house on Earth, would be the human equivalent of Prostetnic Vogon Jeltz.

This is what we came up with as a summary of the Belbin Roles of these beloved THHGTTG folks, but if any fans of Douglas Adam’s work and also Meredith Belbin’s work would like to add any observations, please feel free to do so.

It is after all a wee bit subjective when apportioning behavioural characteristics to fictional characters that manifest in different versions of Adam’s works.

We’d love to hear from you if you have any more thoughts on the matter.

Belbin is a great model for team building, leadership development and self-awareness. Whilst we have used it somewhat tongue in cheek here, it does powerful things with real world teams and leaders.

And remember, always know where your towel is!

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