Fictitious Characters in AACR2 and RDA

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In AACR2 fictitious characters are treated exclusively as subjects. When cataloging a book or other work attributed to a fictitious character or characters under AACR2, we are not permitted to create main or added entries (authorized/descriptive access points in RDA) for the fictitious creators or contributors. Therefore, under AACR2 only subject authority records were created for fictitious characters. (I use the past tense because as of March 31, 2013, all new authority records are to use RDA rules.)

However, RDA permits creation of personal name authority records for fictitious characters, among other entities. RDA chapter 9, which deals with constructing authorized access points for persons, states that “Persons include persons named in religious works, fictitious and legendary persons, and real or fictitious non-human entities.”

Under RDA, then it is possible for a book or other work attributed to a fictitious character to be described with an access point for that character, as well as to assign a subject heading for that character if s/he is treated in the work. Therefore, personal name authority records are created for fictitious characters when necessary.

Initially (in 2012), the Library of Congress made the decision that fictitious characters would be assigned two headings: a personal name authority record (NAR) for the fictitious character as creator, and an LCSH subject authority record (SAR) for the same character as subject.

In July, 2013, however, revisions to RDA (addition of instructions in RDA 9.6 pertaining to fictitious or legendary persons) made it possible to establish all headings for individual fictitious characters in the Library of Congress name authority file.

All new headings for individual fictitious characters are now to be established in the name authority file in the 100 field of the MARC 21 authority records. These personal name headings may be used as descriptive access points in MARC fields 100 or 700, as well as subjects, entered in MARC field 600.

Headings for groups of fictitious characters (the Hardy Boys, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle, etc.) will continue to be established in LCSH, tagged 150 in subject authority records.
As time permits, the Library of Congress Policy and Standards Division will create RDA personal name headings for the fictitious characters that are currently established in LCSH, and cancel the subject heading records. To a limited extent, this work has begun.

The majority of personal name authority records for fictitious characters include the parenthetical phrase (Fictitious character) after the name; some do not.

RDA treats the phrase “fictitious character” as an “other designation associated with a person” and states that addition of an “other designation” is a required (or core) element of an authorized access point only when needed to distinguish between two otherwise identical names.

However, RDA 9.6 also states “For a fictitious or legendary person, record Fictitious character, Legendary character, or another appropriate designation.”

For now, cataloger judgment various among NACO contributors as to the necessity of adding the designation “Fictitious character” to personal name authority records for all fictitious characters or only in those cases when there would otherwise be a conflict with the name authority record for another person.