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Donation makes fantastic story Huge sci-fi collection goes to Alberta

By **ROSS ROMANIUK, SUN MEDIA**

Even the size of a Winnipeg man's science fiction collection pushes the boundaries of reality.

Now Chester Cuthbert wants his collection to enrich young people's minds as it has done with his imagination for decades. He's donating his entire treasure trove of science fiction -- an estimated 60,000 books and magazines compiled since the 1920s -- to the University of Alberta.

"They've provided me with instruction and entertainment," said Cuthbert, who turns 95 in a couple of weeks.

"It's important to stimulate the imagination. Reading fantastic literature has been a joy to me, and I hope that other people enjoy it too."

The senior's astonishing accumulation includes periodicals, some of his own published fiction and piles of letters to and from other sci-fi buffs. And virtually all of it had been in boxes stacked in his Mulvey Avenue house.

"You name it, my dad has it," Raymond Cuthbert, the aficionado's son, said of the collection that started when his father read a story by Edgar Rice Burroughs as a youth.

"From that point on, he became interested in fantastic literature and began seeking it out. There was no such term as science fiction when he began collecting. That came later."

Chester Cuthbert said one of the reasons he's parting with his books is that his eyesight is "deteriorating quite badly," making reading difficult.

During a decades-long career in Winnipeg's insurance industry and while raising five children, Cuthbert collected a wealth of reading material.

REPUTATION, CAPACITY

Following his wife's death last January, Cuthbert decided to part with his treasure and selected Edmonton's University of Alberta to take the materials -- valued at up to \$1 million -- because of the institution's literary reputation and capacity to care for it.

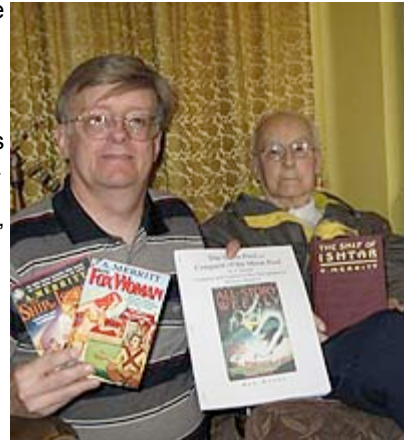
"There is no equivalent institution here that can handle this volume of collection," explained Raymond Cuthbert, 52.

"The public library, University of Manitoba or University of Winnipeg would be incapacitated with a donation of this size. They just don't have the people or the space to deal with it."

Randy Reichardt, a former Winnipeg resident, is one of two U of A library officials charged with organizing the books and magazines -- including westerns and other genres of fiction -- for shipment west.

The work for him brings back memories of his youth in the '70s, when he came to know Cuthbert and relished his stuff with other teens.

"He opened his house to us, and his wife always had cookies and drinks. It was just an amazing place," said Reichardt. "He would pull gems out, and we'd sit there with our jaws on the floor."



Science fiction enthusiast Chester Cuthbert (right), with son Raymond, is donating 60,000 books to the University of Alberta. (Ross Romaniuk, Sun Media)