

# Omni

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PROFESSIONAL  
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◀ Stephens, with his nose for electronic surplus, bought two microwave antennas for \$1 each in 1981. ▶

## ANTI MATTER

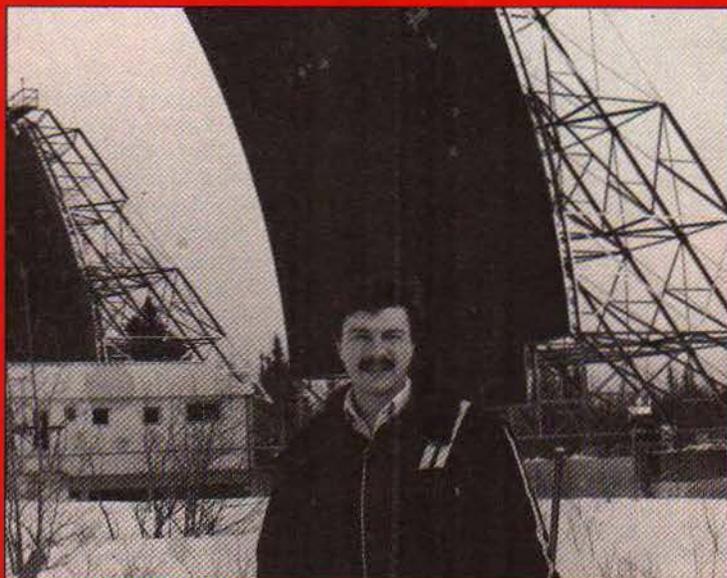
With single-minded devotion to his cause, Robert Stephens (at right) has divested himself of virtually all worldly possessions to join the search for life on other worlds.

The thirty-one-year-old electronics technician from Edmonton quit a good job with Canadian National Telecommunications and liquidated his entire electronics business to raise money for his own Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI). Now living on borrowed money and occasional freelance electronics work, he cannot pay his telephone bills or even his membership fees in Carl Sagan's Planetary Society. But Stephens has what few others have—two magnificent 60-foot radio telescopes.

Stephens's telescopes were originally part of Canada's Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line radar network. But in 1963 the relay facility at Hay River was declared obsolete. Stephens, who "has a good nose for electronic surplus," bought them for \$1 each in 1981.

Stephens transported some of his equipment to Hay River, Canada, for trial observations in the summer of 1983. And he soon solicited support from the Hay River town council, asking members to help him acquire the land and the building containing the antennas. After all, Stephens pointed out, the town would have the sole Canadian SETI program, one of only a handful in the world. Tourism would increase, and students could participate, putting Hay River on the map.

The council was enthusiastic. When the property came up for auction, the town submitted a \$1 bid so that Stephens's \$4,000 bid would be the clear winner. Unfortunately,



## UFO UPDATE

although he has managed to accumulate \$1 million worth of essential surplus electronics, he is currently "hanging at the end of my credit rope."

But Stephens, who says his work complements SETI programs at NASA and Harvard, believes he will prevail. He points out that since his telescopes scan only a narrow swath of the circumpolar sky, his coverage of stars to the north is necessarily more intense. Furthermore, while NASA's program must rely on limited telescope time—other branches of the organization need to use the telescopes as well—SETI data can constantly be generated by, and tested on, Stephens's equipment.

"It's still a one-man show," Stephens asserts. But, he adds, things will change as he continues to earn the respect of mainstream researchers—"those who share an urgent concern for SETI on an insignificant yet life-supporting planet whose chances for survival were never more unsure."

—ROBERT A. FREITAS, JR.