THE ULTIMATE COMPUTER

Rowland Emett's moving, blinking, noise-making marvel is designed to put technology in its place

The serious and often forbidding science of automated calculation was put in its place recently when Honeywell's electronic data processing division—in collaboration with Rowland Emett, the celebrated British cartoonist—presented for the first time in the U.S. what it terms the "ultimate" computer, officially described as the Honeywell-Emett Forget-Me-Not. This moving, blinking, noise-making marvel—a sort of four-dimensional cartoon—is constructed of bamboo, birds, door knobs, lamp shades, playing cards and measuring tapes.

"Our commission to Emett to invent the Forget-Me-Not stemmed from a belief that there is room for some levity in an industry that has been taken so seriously for the past 20 years," explains Walter W. Finke, group vice president of Honeywell's Computer Group. "We went into this project because we think humor is as important to society as the fruits of technology. Comic relief can help us retain our perspective." To which Emett adds, "We know there are machines in the world, but we try to keep them in their place. After all, I'm the boss over the machines I build. . . well, only just barely."

The Forget-Me-Not's central processor is a stylized seven-foot-high elephant known as a Peripheral Pachyderm (because elephants never forget). Its multiplicity of tiny minds think in a clockwise direction, influenced by still tinier minds which only oscillate. This memory, in turn, is influenced by a main brain, which is activated by a closed circuit of specially lightened heavy water. "The effect of all that water on the brain," Emmett states, "is to flush any wrong numbers or unworthy thoughts down the brain drain."

The Forget-Me-Not's memory cycle time (a critical measurement of the internal speed of all computers) is the Billicycle. Emett defines the Billicycle as the unit of time it takes little Billy, sitting on his bicycle, to ferry a message from one end of the computer to the other.

Considered by Emett to be "the most moving fitment in the entire computer" is memory lane, which offers a collection of Forget-Me-Not's especially treasured remembrances, all intermittently in view behind the doors which discreetly open and close "to keep the memories green." Included is The Ancestral Home, where Honeywell first began in "Eighteen-Hundred-and-Something-Or-Other"; Mother, a sweet old thermionic valve (an early Honeywell computer product); First Love, where positive meets negative; First Success (two plus two equals six—no, dammit, four); and "1066" (the Battle of Hastings, which is an important date in the minds of all British computers).

Flanking the computer's main elephant—known as the main frame in computerese—is FRED (Fantastically Rapid Evaluator and Dispenser) who leans nonchalantly on his static discharge umbrella (which, among other things, protects him from lightning), scans his program (any real computer has to have a program) and teases Forget-Me-Not with a "bun" (British for "punched cards") pre-loaded with all kinds of important information. He also has a set of magnetic butterflies built into his mid-section to prove he is almost human and concentrating intently.

Standing at a discreet distance behind the central processor—dubbed Forget-Me-Not, Sr.—is Forget-Me-Not, Jr., a smaller pachyderm in charge of the card reading and punching department. The card punch uses a set of electrified woodpeckers, while cards are read "through a glass lightly" by a roving electronic eye.

CARD PUNCH-READ UNIT

F.R.E.D.

HONEYWELL-EMETT Computer

SONIC CONTROL

INFORMATION FEEDING
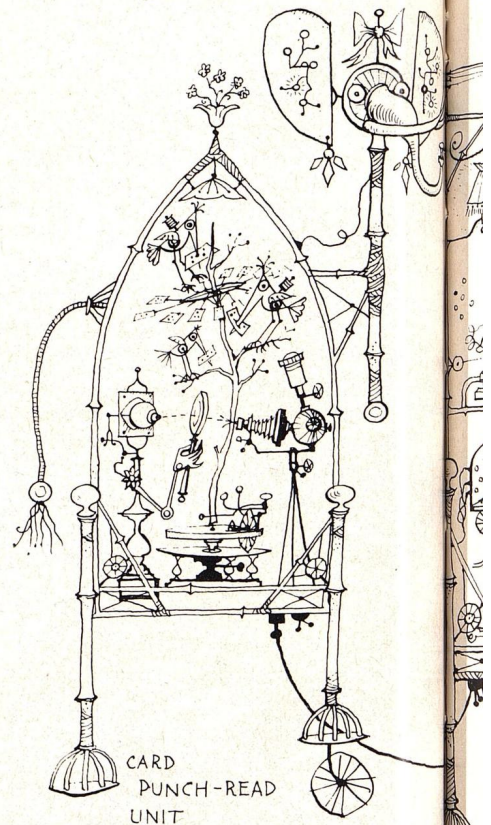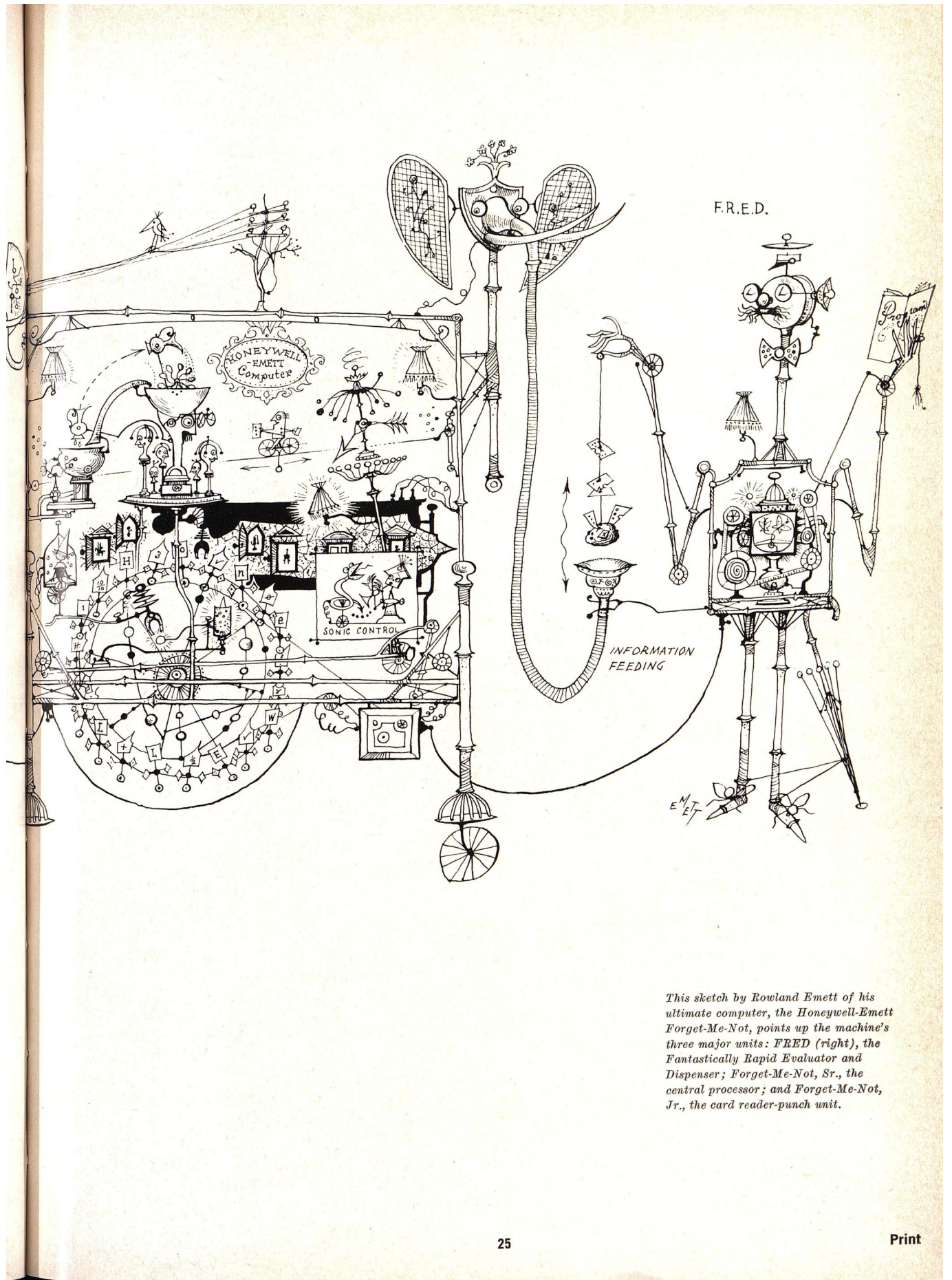
E M E T T

*This sketch by Rowland Emett of his
ultimate computer, the Honeywell-Emett
Forget-Me-Not, points up the machine's
three major units: FRED (right), the
Fantastically Rapid Evaluator and
Dispenser; Forget-Me-Not, Sr., the
central processor; and Forget-Me-Not,
Jr., the card reader-punch unit.*

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