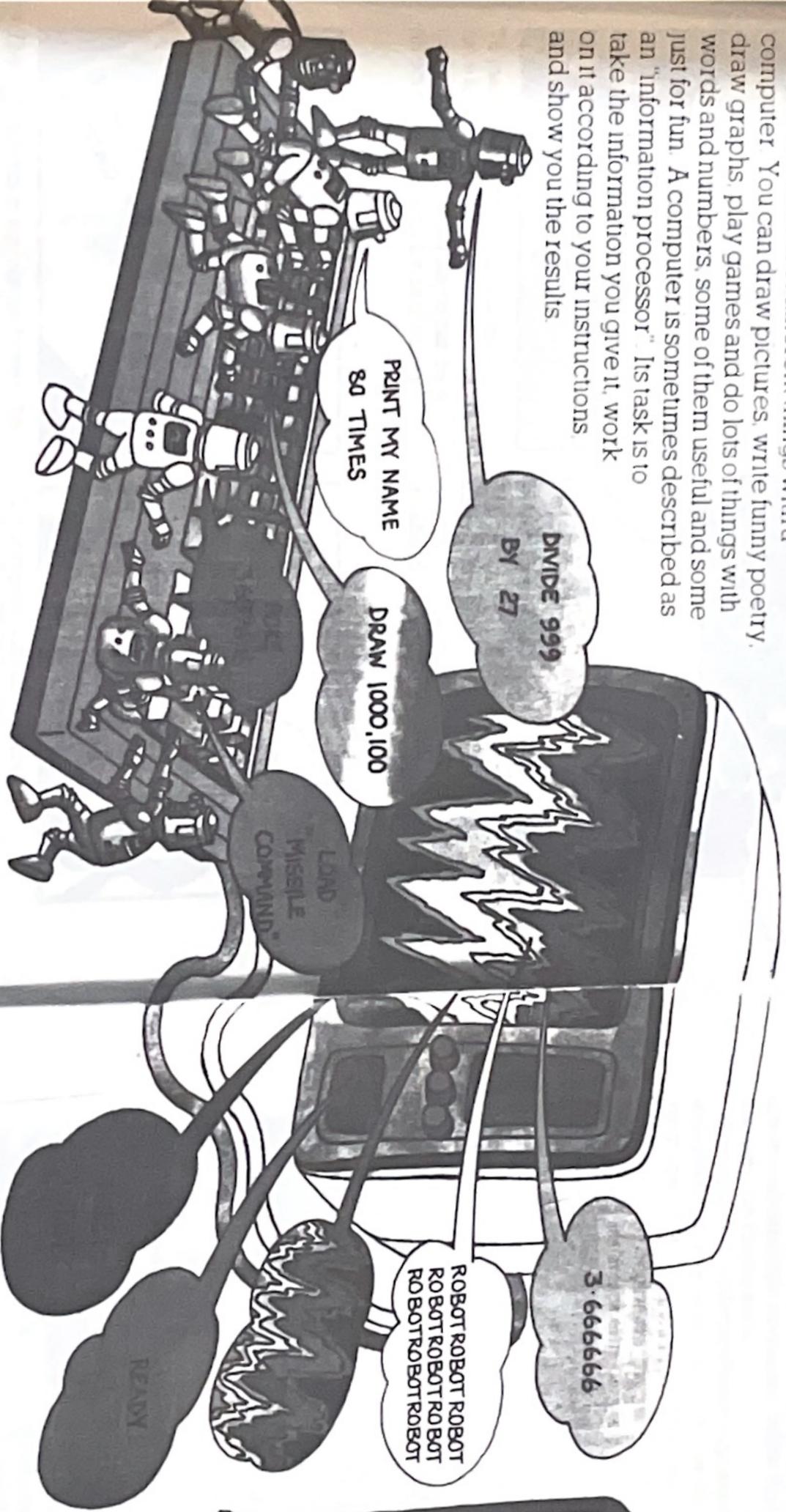


How a computer works

You can do all kinds of different things with a computer. You can draw pictures, write funny poetry, draw graphs, play games and do lots of things with words and numbers, some of them useful and some just for fun. A computer is sometimes described as an "information processor". Its task is to take the information you give it, work on it according to your instructions and show you the results.



To make a computer do what you want you have to give it very precise instructions. A list of instructions for a computer is called a program* and the information you give the computer to

work on is called data. The program has to be written in a language, such as BASIC, that the computer can understand, and it must follow all the rules of the language too.

Microcomputers

Most micros consist of a keyboard which you plug into a TV set. You give the micro instructions and information by typing on the keyboard and everything you type, along with the computer's results, is displayed on the TV screen.

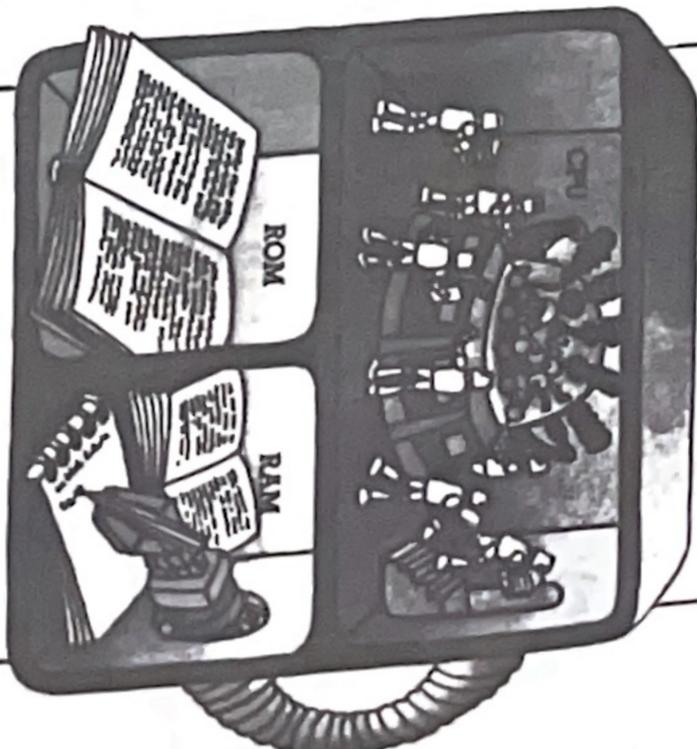
Some micros have a small, built-in display screen, like a pocket calculator. A few use a special screen called a monitor. A monitor is like a TV but it cannot pick up the signals from TV stations.



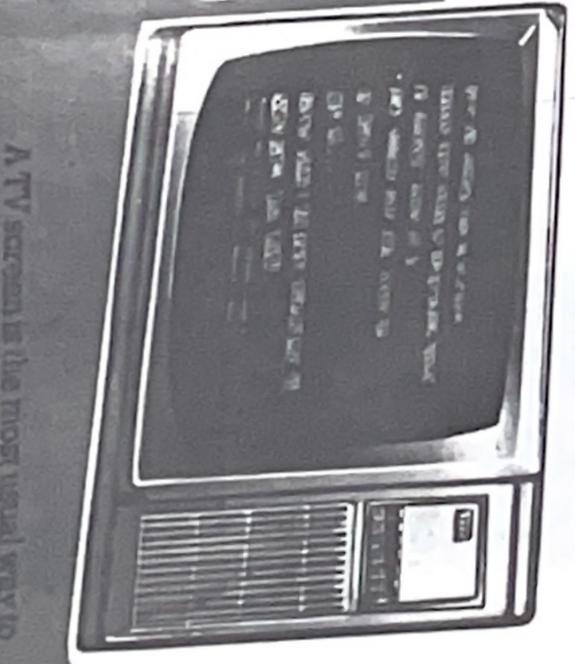
The keyboard of a micro looks like a typewriter keyboard with some extra keys. On some micros each key gives the computer a separate instruction in BASIC so you do not have to type the words in letter by letter.

Inside a micro

A micro is made up of two main parts: the central processing unit (CPU) where all the work is done, and the memory where programs and data are stored.



In fact, the computer has two memories. One, called ROM, contains a program which controls all the operations of the computer. The other, called RAM, is an empty memory where your programs and data are stored. When you switch off the micro all the information in RAM is lost, but the ROM program is permanent.



A TV screen is the most usual way to display the information from a micro. You can also print it out on paper, using a printer. This is useful as the information in the micro and on the TV screen is lost when you switch them off.



Another way to store information from a micro is with a cassette recorder. You can store programs and data on a cassette, then load them back into the micro when you want to use them.