

Electrillo Encounters

Dr. Voltäge

We can only hope that future episodes of Electrillo will explain what drove the evil Dr. Voltäge to the dark side. There may be a clue if you look at the crafty bovine's nostrils. They look suspiciously like an old-fashioned two-prong plug that doesn't have a grounding pin.

New appliances have a third pin—a grounding pin that protects you from getting an electric charge when you insert a plug into an outlet. Two-prong plugs are proper for appliances that do not rely on grounding to provide protection from shock, such as “double-insulated” power tools.

The third prong has an important function. If a hot wire comes loose



inside an ungrounded metal case, and the loose wire touches the case, anyone who touches it will get a shock. With a third prong, electricity from the hot wire

flows straight to the ground, and trips the fuse or breaks the circuit. The appliance won't work, but it won't kill you either.

Sometimes people cut off the grounding pin of a three-prong plug to try to fit it into a two-pin outlet. That's a very dangerous thing to do. Did someone try that on Dr. Voltäge? Did such a reckless act frizzle his hair and fry his brain? Only cartoonist Keith Graves knows, and he's not telling—not yet.

When there's a three-pin appliance and a two-pin plug in your house, your parents have a couple of choices.

1. Use an adapter, or
2. Call an electrician to have your outlets updated.

It's important to pay attention to such details because plugs and cords are involved in about 20 percent of all home electrical wiring system fires each year, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission.

Cartoonist Keith Graves is a popular artist and author of children's books. Among his great hits are *Frank Was a Monster Who Wanted to Dance*, *Uncle Blubbafink's Seriously Ridiculous Stories* and *Loretta: Ace Pinky Scout*.

