

Ringside seats at Fruit Fly Fight Club

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The first rule of Fruit Fly Fight Club: Flies can't talk about Fruit Fly Fight Club. Because they can't talk at all. At least not to humans. Researchers at Harvard Medical School took a break from studying lobster fighting and shifted their focus to fruit fly fights, and even mutant fruit fly fights. (Via The Annals of Improbable Research.) Fruit flies are strange creatures. Or perhaps it's that fruit fly researchers are strange creatures. One of my cousins was a fruit fly researcher. She took fruit fly testicles and squashed them and then studied them under a microscope, looking for... something... I forget. I think just finding the fruit fly testicles in the first place was accomplishment enough. Fruit fly researchers like to give their discoveries strange names. Typically, a gene is named after what results when you disable it. For example, a gene without which fruit flies die in two days is named Kenny, after the South Park character. My favorite: The gene without which fruit flies get drunk really easily is called cheap date. (That last page has several more funny gene names.) Yes, that's right. Fruit flies get drunk. There's a fruit fly drunk-o-meter, though I forget how it works. But one amusing aspect of fruit fly drunkenness is that just before they finally pass out, there's a big burst of activity.

Strange gene naming has spread beyond the fruit fly world. There is a human gene named sonic hedgehog after the Sega video game character. (It's related to the fruit fly gene "hedgehog", so named because disabling it causes the fly to develop into a ball with spikes.)

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