

# Black hole caught devouring star

**Paris:** Scientists have witnessed the rare spectacle of a supermassive black hole devouring a star that had ventured too close — an event that occurs about once in 10,000 years, they reported on Wednesday. Matter-sucking black holes normally lurk dormant and undetected at the centre of galaxies, but can occasionally be tracked by the scraps left over from their stellar feasts.

“Black holes, like sharks, suffer from a popular misconception that they are perpetual killing machines,” said researcher Ryan Chornock from the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics in Massachusetts.

If a star passes too close,



**FEAST IN SPACE:** A computer-simulated image released by Nasa shows gas from a tidally shredded star falling into a black hole

the black hole's gravitational pull can rip it apart before sucking in its gases, which

are heated by the friction and start to glow, giving away the silent killer's hiding place.

Chornock and his colleagues observed such a glow in May 2010 through a telescope mounted on Mount Haleakala in Hawaii, as well as a Nasa satellite. The flare brightened to a peak that July, before fading away over the course of a year, the scientists said.

After several months of observations the team to conclude the black hole was at the centre of a galaxy 2.7 billion light-years away, and about three million times the mass of our Sun. Its victim was probably a star in its late, red giant phase which had tempted fate by wandering to within 150 million km of the black hole — about the distance of Earth from the Sun. PTI