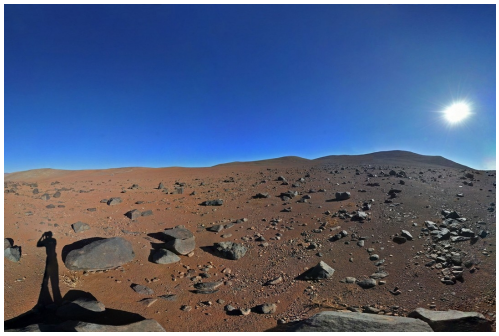

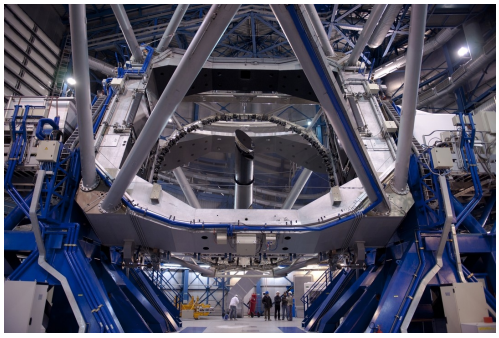

S1 - 04. CHILE, AN ASTRONOMERS' DESERT (**)

Director(s): Pierre-François DIDEK

Writer(s): Serge BRUNIER, Bruno BUCHER

(**) Full Engl. version available.

At an altitude of over 2600 metres, in the Atacama Desert in northern Chile, the VLT (Very Large Telescope) appears like an island lost in the middle of nowhere. The VLT, operated by the European Southern Observatory, is the most productive ground-based facility for astronomy.

Serge Brunier arrives at the foot of the Cerro Paranal. At the top of this mountain, the four domes of this giant telescope rise above the sea of clouds that bathes the Pacific coast. The climate and quality of air make this site one of the unique vantage points in the world.

Every night, through the VLT, astronomers from around the world scrutinize the Milky Way and penetrate deep into the heart of other galaxies. In their company, Serge opens the doors of the infinitely large. Indeed, the magnifying power of this instrument is mind-blowing. It enables us to travel back in time to produce images of stars located at the limit of the universe.

Not far from here though, on a neighbouring mountain, work has started on a new gigantic project - the construction of the EELT (European Extremely Large Telescope). Thirty times more powerful than the VLT, it should be able to observe the early universe and to get as close as possible to the Big Bang that happened 13.8 billion years ago in order to piece together its history.

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