

Bittersweet as
Angel's Fruit

Bittersweet as Angel's Fruit

Bennie Russchen

Writer:	Bennie Russchen
Special thanks:	Erik van Zandvliet
Cover and design:	Famke Bergmans
ISBN:	9789403814612
© BERUBooks	

The Personal Diary of Ethan Walker If found, please return to:
1422 Willow Lane, Sector 8, New Chicago, North American
Federation

March 10, 2090

I never thought I'd be the kind of person to keep a diary. But these days, everything feels like it's slipping through our fingers, and maybe putting it into words will help me make sense of it all. Or maybe it's just a way for me to leave something behind, in case there's nothing left in the end. Earth is breaking. You can feel it in the air thick, heavy, almost suffocating. The heat clings to your skin, making every breath feel like an effort. The streets are filled with a cacophony of noises, people shouting, vehicles rumbling, the distant hum of machinery struggling to keep the city running. And the smell... a mix of exhaust, sweat, and something burnt, a constant reminder of just how broken everything is. The desperation is etched into every face you pass on the street, eyes that are tired and hopeless.

I saved a few articles today, reminders of what we're up against. Not that I really need reminding.

News Article Excerpt: *"Global Population Surpasses 20 Billion: Humanity at the Breaking Point"*

The United Nations announced today that Earth's population has officially crossed the 20 billion mark. Food and water shortages are now commonplace, with many nations struggling to maintain civil stability amid resource scarcity. Experts warn that without drastic measures, the planet may face societal collapse within the next decade. Climate change, mass

migration, and dwindling arable land have turned Earth into a pressure cooker, ready to explode.

It's strange to think of myself as part of the problem. One more human adding to the strain. But I'm trying to be part of the solution too. That's why I signed up for the mission. It feels like the only chance left, even if it means leaving everything behind.

March 16, 2090

I went to a football game last night. It was held in one of the few enclosed environment stadiums left, massive domes that can still generate artificial oxygen. You could actually breathe in there without a mask, feel the freshness of the air as you cheered. It was expensive, but the high from the game, the noise of the crowd, and the clean air, it was worth every credit. The game itself was tight, with both teams pushing hard until the end. It ended 2-1 for the New Chicago Chargers. The energy in the stadium was electric, like we were all part of something bigger. For a few hours, it felt like the old days. I remember going to games with my dad, back when we could still watch them outdoors. The air wasn't as clean back then, but it was real, and the excitement was just as palpable. People smiling, cheering for their team, like everything wasn't falling apart just outside those walls. I think that's why everyone keeps going. It's not just the game, it's the illusion that things are normal. That feeling is priceless, even if it's fleeting.

News Article Excerpt: *"Ration riots in major cities as resources run dry"*

Riots broke out today in several major cities around the globe as dwindling food and water supplies pushed citizens to the breaking point. In New Delhi, thousands took to the streets demanding increased rations, resulting in violent clashes with law enforcement. Similar scenes played out in Cairo, São Paulo, and Jakarta. Governments are urging calm, but with resources running dry, the situation grows more volatile by the day.

I wonder if they knew. The people in charge, I mean. Did they see this coming years ago and decide to just let it happen? Or were they too scared to make the hard choices? Not that it matters now. The result is the same. Chaos, suffering, and a world that can't sustain us any longer. I signed up for the Proxima mission because I can't just sit here and watch everything fall apart. I need to do something, even if it means never seeing home again.

March 17, 2090

I did it.

I actually hit submit.

It feels ridiculous even writing that, like I've just tossed a paper airplane into a hurricane and hoped it might find the eye.

Millions will apply for the Proxima Mission, every desperate genius, idealist, and survivalist clinging to the last sliver of hope. I'm just one name in an ocean of them. Why would they pick me?

But I had to try.

Bittersweet as Angel's Fruit

After everything we've watched fall apart, after the ration riots, the evacuation zones, the collapsing coastlines, what else is left? Sitting here, waiting for the next crisis to claim us? No. I can't. Not anymore.

The form itself wasn't even that long. They already know everything about us, probably scraped our data from a hundred different databases. But still, when I reached the end, I froze. Not because of fear (because I've had years to get used to fear) but because of what it means IF they say yes.

It means goodbye. Forever.

To Earth, to New Chicago, to everything familiar. Maybe even to anyone who remembers me. Sixty years in cryo. I'll wake up on a different planet, if I wake up at all. No way to know if the ship will make it, if the stasis pods will hold, if Proxima b will even welcome us. It's not a mission it's a bet. A gamble that something out there is better than something we've already ruined.

So why do it?

Because someone has to.

Because for all the ways we've failed this planet, maybe we don't have to fail the next one.

I don't expect to be chosen. Hell, I'd be shocked if they even read my application. But if by some miracle they do... then at least I won't have to regret doing nothing.

At least I'll know I raised my hand when it mattered.

Proxima Mission Overview

The Proxima Mission, officially known as "The New Earth Mission" is humanity's desperate attempt to establish a foothold on Proxima Centauri b, a planet believed to be habitable with a 99% likelihood. The initiative is also called "Earth's last hope" behind closed doors or simply "Our Lifeline," highlighting its significance to a dying world. With Earth on the brink of collapse, the mission has been framed as our best and only chance for survival.

The mission aims to send a crew of 100 individuals. Scientists, engineers, doctors and specialists on a 60-year journey to Proxima Centauri b. The objective is clear: assess the planet's viability, establish a sustainable colony, and lay the groundwork for the arrival of more colonists in the future. The ship, named Odyssey, is equipped with cryogenic chambers that will keep the crew in stasis for most of the journey, awakening them at key intervals for maintenance checks and assessments.

The hope is that, by the time Odyssey arrives, Proxima Centauri b will become humanity's second chance, a place where we can rebuild, away from the irreversible damage that has plagued Earth. But as optimistic as the mission sounds, there is no guarantee. If the planet proves hostile or unsuitable, there will be no return. For many of us, it's a leap into the unknown, a leap that just might be humanity's last shot at survival.

Application Form - New Earth Plan

Name: Ethan Walker
Date of birth: October 10, 2058
Place of birth: New Chicago, North American Federation
Skills: Structural Engineering, Team Leadership, Crisis Management
Degrees: Bachelor's in Civil Engineering, Master's in Structural Engineering

Bio

Ethan Walker is a seasoned construction engineer with over 15 years of experience working on large-scale infrastructure projects across the North American Federation. Known for his resourcefulness and ability to stay calm under pressure, Ethan has led numerous teams in high-stress environments, often dealing with the aftermath of natural disasters and resource scarcity.

Motivation

I want to be part of the solution. Earth is breaking, and I can't just watch it happen without trying to make a difference. The Proxima Mission is our chance to start over, to do things right this time. I'm ready to leave everything behind to help humanity take this next step.

March 18, 2090

Today, I got an email from the mission board. I can't believe it. My final clearance is approved. I'm officially one of the hundred chosen to leave Earth, Chief Engineer, no less! I was stunned when I read it. I mean, I knew I had the skills, but to be chosen for such a critical role... It's overwhelming. I should feel relieved, but all I feel is this heavy sadness. I keep thinking about my mom and my sister. They told me they were proud of me when I got through the initial selection. They said I was brave, but I don't feel brave. I feel like I'm running away, but maybe that's what survival is... Knowing when to leave.

I've copied the email below, just to remind myself that this is real:

Email from Mission Board

Subject: Final Clearance Approval - Proxima Mission (New Earth mission)

Dear Ethan Walker,

We are pleased to inform you that you have been officially selected as Chief Engineer for the Proxima Mission. Your expertise in structural engineering and leadership capabilities make you an ideal candidate for this critical role. Along with your engineering skills, this means you are also part of the leadership council as the representative of the engineers. You may be called upon to make legal or ethical decisions alongside the mission commander and other chiefs. This mission represents humanity's hope for a future beyond Earth, and your contributions will be essential to its success.

Please make final preparations for departure. Further instructions will follow.

Congratulations, and welcome to the New Earth Plan.

Best regards,

Mission Board, Proxima Centauri b Colonization Initiative

News Article Excerpt: *"Coastal Cities Brace for Rising Seas: Millions at Risk"*

Scientists report that sea levels have risen by an average of 15 centimeters in the last year alone, prompting emergency measures in several coastal megacities. New York, Tokyo, and Mumbai are all facing severe flooding, with millions of residents forced to evacuate to makeshift inland camps. The situation has been described as 'a humanitarian crisis on an unprecedented scale,' with no clear solution in sight.

The camps. I saw them when I went to visit my sister. They stretch for miles, rows and rows of temporary shelters that aren't so temporary anymore. People who once had lives, homes, everything they're just trying to find a place where they can still exist. It's all so fragile. I keep thinking, what if Proxima Centauri b is just another fragile hope? What if we get there, and it's no better than here? But what if it's our only chance?

March 22, 2090

I started packing today. Not that I have much to bring. Just a few personal items, photos, and this notebook. The rest of it doesn't matter. I guess that's the funny thing about leaving Earth. You realize how little of it you actually need to carry with you. I decided to bring the old air-disc my dad and I used to play with on the beach. We used to have so much fun throwing it back and forth, trying to catch it as it glided through the air. Back then, about half the days the air was safe to breathe without masks, and you could actually smell the ocean. On perfect days, the ocean smelled fresh and salty, like freedom. I wonder if the new world has oceans... Will we ever be able to recreate moments like that? I hope so. Maybe that's why I'm bringing the air-disc, as a small piece of the past that I hope we can revive on Proxima Centauri b. I want to believe that one day, we'll stand on a new beach, under a clear sky, and throw the disc just like we used to. Maybe we'll make new memories that are just as precious. I came across another article. I almost didn't save it, but then I thought, why not? It's part of the story too.

News Article Excerpt: *"Mass Extinction Event Looming as Biodiversity Plummets"*

Scientists have issued a dire warning that Earth is currently undergoing a mass extinction event, with nearly 50% of all species now facing the threat of extinction. Habitat loss, climate change, and pollution are accelerating the collapse of ecosystems worldwide. The disappearance of marine life, pollinators, and other critical flora could trigger a chain reaction that will further jeopardize human survival.

It's hard to look at these headlines and not feel a sense of doom. But maybe that's why I need to do this. Maybe this mission isn't just about escaping, maybe it's about seeing if humanity can be something better somewhere else. I don't know. I just know I can't stay here and watch it all fade away.

March 26, 2090

Two months. That's all I have left before launch. I keep telling myself that this is for the best, that leaving is the right thing to do. But it feels like every goodbye I say chips away at me. Mom says she understands, that she's proud of me. But her eyes were red, and she hugged me like she'd never let go. My sister tried to smile, but I could see the fear there. I wish I could promise them that everything will be okay. I wish I could believe it myself.

Do I have doubts? Of course I do. Some nights I lie awake, wondering if I've made the biggest mistake of my life. What if I never see them again? What if this mission fails, and I leave behind everything I know and love for nothing? I tell myself that this is bigger than me, that it's about giving humanity a chance. But it's hard to let go of the people who mean the most to you. The sadness is like a weight on my chest, but I have to keep moving forward. If I let myself drown in it, I'll never be able to take this step.

Maybe out there, on Proxima Centauri b, we can build something better. Maybe we can learn from all the mistakes we've made here. Or maybe we'll just make new ones. I don't know. But at least we'll have tried.

March 28, 2090

Today, I had my first meeting with Commander Elena Vasquez, and it left a lasting impression. I've been harboring quiet fears about the leadership of this mission, afraid it might lean on military precision or authoritarian rule. But the moment I stepped into Vasquez's office, I felt a sense of relief. She's a civilian, and it shows in the best ways possible. Her approach feels grounded, focused on people and collaboration rather than rigid hierarchy. It's refreshing, and exactly what we need.

Her office was modest yet efficient. No unnecessary clutter, just a sleek desk with a single tablet, a few mission files neatly arranged, and a wall screen scrolling through updates. It wasn't cold, though. The simplicity felt intentional, as if every detail served a purpose. When she greeted me, her handshake was firm, and her smile, while brief, felt genuine. "Chief Walker," she said, "thank you for coming. Your perspective is invaluable to this mission." Her voice had a calm authority, the kind that doesn't demand respect but earns it effortlessly.

We sat down to discuss the roster, and I was struck by how much she valued my input. She didn't treat me like just another cog in the machine; she wanted to know my honest opinions about the team. We started with Samir Khan, the systems specialist. I mentioned his brilliance but also my concerns about his tendency to overwork. She nodded, her expression thoughtful. "We'll keep an eye on him," she said. "Burnout is the last thing we need out there."

Then there was Riley Jones, the technical security specialist. I brought up his no-nonsense demeanor and how it might clash with Priya Patel, our biologist, whose idealistic outlook might rub him the wrong way. Vasquez chuckled lightly. "Tension isn't always a bad thing," she said. "But let me know if it starts

becoming a distraction."It wasn't just the way she listened, it was the way she engaged. Every question she asked felt deliberate, designed to dig deeper into how we could function as a team. It's clear she doesn't see this mission as just a technical endeavor; she sees it as a human one. That perspective reassures me more than I can put into words.

What stood out most was her ability to balance the weight of the mission with empathy. She's not just leading us to Proxima Centauri b. She's trying to show us what humanity can be at its best. Her presence has this grounding effect, making you feel like even in the face of the unknown, there's a chance we can succeed. I walked out of her office feeling something I haven't felt in a long time... hope. If anyone can lead us to a new beginning, it's Commander Vasquez, and I'm grateful the mission planners chose a civilian. It's a reminder that this isn't just about survival but it's about building something better.

CNN News Article: "New Earth Mission: Humanity's Final Hope"

By Clara Sanchez, CNN Science Correspondent

March 30, 2090

In what may be the most ambitious endeavor in human history, the New Earth Mission is set to launch in just two months. This interstellar colonization effort, a collaboration between the United Nations and global space agencies, is humanity's desperate response to decades of environmental degradation, overpopulation, and dwindling resources. With Earth on the brink of collapse, the mission to establish a colony on Proxima Centauri b has been dubbed by many as "humanity's last hope."

The Mission

The New Earth Mission is centered on Proxima Centauri b, an exoplanet 4.24 light-years away that scientists estimate has a 99% chance of being habitable. The mission aims to assess the planet's viability, establish the foundations of a colony, and ultimately provide a lifeline for future generations. The journey will take 60 years aboard the Odyssey, a state-of-the-art spacecraft equipped with cryogenic chambers to preserve the crew for most of the voyage.

"This isn't just about survival," Commander Elena Vasquez stated in a press conference. "This is about building something better. a second chance for humanity to prove it can rise above its past mistakes."

The Crew

The mission's crew of 100 represents some of the best and brightest minds from across the globe, selected after a rigorous screening process. Each member was chosen not only for their technical expertise but also for their psychological resilience and ability to work as a cohesive team in the most challenging conditions imaginable.

Commander Elena Vasquez: A civilian leader known for her strategic thinking and empathetic leadership style. Vasquez has been hailed as the ideal choice to oversee this delicate and complex mission. "This mission isn't about control. It's about cooperation," she said in an interview. "We're not just sending experts, we're sending people who can work together to build a new world."

Chief Engineer Ethan Walker: A veteran construction engineer with over 15 years of experience in large-scale infrastructure projects. Walker will be responsible for designing and overseeing the construction of the colony's essential structures. Walker is best known for his design of the Multipurpose entertainment centers spread all over Northern America. The mix of scandinavian design mixed with efficient planning starting from the floorplan might just be what this mission needs.

Systems Specialist Samir Khan: Known for his innovative work in spacecraft systems and automation, Khan will ensure the Odyssey and the colony's systems run smoothly. "The technology is incredible," Khan stated. "But it's up to us to make it work in the unknown."

Biologist Priya Patel: A passionate researcher dedicated to studying extraterrestrial ecosystems. Patel's work will focus on understanding Proxima Centauri b's environment and ensuring the survival of Earth-based flora and fauna in the new habitat. "This mission isn't just about humans, it's about preserving the life we're bringing with us," Patel emphasized.

The Challenges

The mission is not without risks. Decades in cryogenic stasis, reliance on cutting-edge technology, and the uncertainties of an alien world pose significant challenges. "We understand the stakes," Walker admitted. "The margin for error is razor-thin, but we're prepared for it."

Despite these risks, the mission has ignited hope in a weary global population. Citizens worldwide are following updates with a mix of anticipation and anxiety. "It feels like a lifeline," one

viewer commented. "We need this to succeed, not just for them, but for all of us."

A Leap Into the Unknown

As the launch date draws near, the crew prepares to leave everything behind family, friends, and the only home humanity has ever known. They do so with a singular purpose: to give the human race a fighting chance at survival.

Will this bold mission succeed? Or will it be remembered as humanity's final, failed gamble? Only time will tell, but for now, the world watches and hopes. How it turns out few people reading this will know because arrival is expected to be in the year 2150.

April 1st, 2090

No april fools joke, I did an interview with a local New Chicago news site today! Mom is so proud of me.

Interview with Ethan Walker, Chief Engineer of the New Earth Mission

Published by New Chicago Herald

Interviewer: Thank you for joining us today, Mr. Walker. The New Earth Mission has captivated the world, and as Chief Engineer, you play a crucial role. Let's start with your background. Where did your journey in engineering begin?

Ethan Walker: It's my pleasure to be here. My journey began right here in New Chicago. I grew up in Sector 8, an area that didn't

have much to boast about except for its hardworking community. My dad was a mechanic, and I spent countless hours in his shop, watching him tinker with machines and solve problems. That's where I fell in love with the idea of building things, of taking pieces and turning them into something useful.

Interviewer: That's a humble start. How did you transition from a small mechanic shop to becoming one of the most renowned engineers in North America?

Ethan Walker: It was a combination of opportunity and determination. I earned a scholarship to the University of Chicago, where I studied civil engineering. After that, I worked on rebuilding infrastructure in the Midwest after the Great Floods of 2075. That project taught me how to innovate under pressure, especially with limited resources.

Later, I was part of the design team for the Multipurpose Entertainment Centers across North America. These structures combined Scandinavian design principles with sustainable engineering, creating spaces that were efficient, versatile, and visually striking. It was one of the projects I'm most proud of because it brought people together in a time when we desperately needed community.

Interviewer: That's impressive. How did those experiences prepare you for your role in the New Earth Mission?

Ethan Walker: Every project I've worked on has been about solving problems with constraints, whether it's resources, time, or environmental challenges. The New Earth Mission is the ultimate test of that. On Proxima Centauri b, we'll face conditions no one has encountered before. My job is to design and oversee the construction of our colony's infrastructure. It's

not just about surviving, it's about creating a foundation for future generations.

Interviewer: That sounds like a monumental task. What motivates you to take on such an extraordinary challenge?

Ethan Walker: Honestly, it's about the chance to make a difference. Earth is struggling, and while there's a lot to fix here, we also need a backup plan. The New Earth Mission is a chance to start fresh, to build something better. It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to apply everything I've learned to something that could determine the future of humanity.

Interviewer: That's inspiring. But leaving everything behind must be difficult. What's been the hardest part of preparing for this mission?

Ethan Walker: The hardest part is saying goodbye. I have family and friends here in New Chicago, and knowing I might never see them again... It's tough. But they've been incredibly supportive, and that helps. I think we all understand what's at stake.

Interviewer: Finally, what message would you like to leave with the people of New Chicago as you prepare for launch?

Ethan Walker: I'd say this: the mission isn't just about the 100 of us going to Proxima Centauri b. It's about everyone back on Earth, too. What we're doing is for humanity's survival, and I hope it inspires people to believe in what's possible when we work together.

Interviewer: Thank you, Mr. Walker. On behalf of New Chicago, we wish you and the entire crew of the New Earth Mission the best of luck.

Ethan Walker: Thank you. It means a lot.

Editor's Note: The New Earth Mission is set to launch in June 2090, marking the start of humanity's first interstellar journey.

April 3, 2090

Today's the day. The day I leave for the mission complex and officially start the journey that will take me farther from Earth than anyone has ever gone. Even as I sit here with my bag packed beside me, it doesn't feel real. This moment has been years in the making, yet somehow it's still impossible to believe. In a matter of hours, I'll leave New Chicago behind... My home, my family, my friends, for a future none of us can fully picture. There's excitement, yes, but it's tangled with a deep, aching sadness that I can't quite shake.

Last night, my mom and sister threw me a goodbye party. It wasn't anything fancy just close family, my best friends, and a few neighbors who've known me since I was a kid. We all crammed into Mom's little living room, the same one where so many of my childhood memories live. Emily strung up decorations, insisting that it wasn't a party without them. Mom cooked all my favorite dishes, even though she was fighting back tears the whole time. It was a night filled with laughter, stories, and moments so bittersweet they're etched into my heart.

At some point, the conversation turned to Dad. It was inevitable, I suppose. He's always been such a big part of who I am. "He'd be so proud of you, Ethan," Mom said, her voice trembling as she dabbed at her eyes with a napkin. "This is exactly the kind of thing he would have wanted for you, to make a difference, to be part of something bigger than yourself."

I couldn't find the words to respond. I just nodded, feeling a lump form in my throat. Dad was the one who taught me to

dream big. He used to say that building something worthwhile, something that lasts is the greatest legacy a person can leave. I became an engineer because of him, because I wanted to carry on that legacy. And now, as I prepare to leave for Proxima Centauri b, I can't help but wonder what he'd say if he were here. I think he'd tell me to go for it, to give it everything I've got. Still, I wish he were here to see it, to tell me he's proud in person.

We stayed up late, talking about everything and nothing. Stories from our childhoods, memories of school, favorite places in the city, all the little things that make life what it is. For a while, it was easy to forget what daybreak would bring. The room was filled with warmth and love, and I wanted to freeze that moment in time, to hold onto it for just a little longer.

Emily hugged me tighter than she ever had before when it was time for me to leave the party. "You're my hero," she whispered, and for a moment, I had to fight to hold myself together. My little sister, the person I used to tease and argue with growing up, now looking at me like I'm someone to look up to. It's humbling, and it's terrifying. My friends, even the jokers, tried to keep the mood light. "Don't forget to send us a postcard," one of them said, cracking a grin. But I could see the sadness in their eyes too. They knew this wasn't just goodbye for now, it was goodbye for a lifetime. Even waking up at the halfway point most of the people I love, most of the people in that room... will be long dead.

Now, as I sit here waiting for the transport to take me to the mission complex, I keep replaying last night in my mind. Those moments, those people, they're what I'm taking with me into the unknown. The love and support they've given me are the foundation I'll build on when I get to Proxima Centauri b. It's strange to think that this might be the last time I ever see them,

the last time I walk these streets or feel the wind off Lake Michigan. But I have to believe this sacrifice is worth it.

I wish I could tell Dad all of this. I wish I could hear him say he's proud. But maybe, in some way, he already knows. Maybe he's watching over me, seeing all of this unfold. I like to think he's the one who planted the seed of courage in me all those years ago, the one that's grown into this moment.

The road ahead is uncertain, but if there's one thing I've learned, it's that the people we love are what give us strength. They're what keep us moving forward, even when the future feels impossibly far away. This is for them... for Mom, for Emily, for Dad, and for everyone who's ever believed in me. It's for humanity, too, for all of us who are clinging to the hope that we can build something better out there.

Here's to the journey ahead. Here's to the people we leave behind but never truly let go of. Here's to making it count.

April 4, 2090

The halls of the mission complex are buzzing with activity today, a blend of nervous energy and excitement that seems to settle into every corner. It's the morning of our official introduction meeting, the moment where the mission begins to feel tangible. Everyone's here, the crew, the mission heads, the press. It's overwhelming, to say the least.

Im writing this just before heading into the meeting room, I caught a glimpse of President Alvarez. I wasn't expecting her to be here, and it took me a moment to recognize her in person. She's smaller than she looks on the news, but her presence commands attention. She's scheduled to deliver a few words to

officially send us off to training and preparation, and I have to admit, I find it commendable that she's making the time. With tensions rising globally and whispers of war growing louder, her priorities must be pulling her in a thousand directions. Yet here she is, standing among us, addressing a mission that most people won't live to see the results of.

Her presence makes me think about the weight of this mission, how it isn't just about us, the 100 individuals preparing to leave Earth. It's about everyone we're leaving behind families, friends, and billions of strangers hoping we succeed. For the first time, it strikes me just how much hope is resting on this mission. The weight of it is staggering.

As I stand here waiting for the meeting to begin, I feel an overwhelming urge to hold on to these moments, to remind myself of what we're leaving behind. The political unrest on Earth, the fragile alliances, the wars looming on the horizon, they're all part of the reason we're doing this. I think I'll add a few news articles to this diary, snapshots of the chaos we're escaping. Not because I want to dwell on it, but because I want to remember why this mission matters so much.

We're not just leaving Earth; we're leaving behind a history of mistakes, conflict, and desperation. But we're also carrying with us the hope that we can learn from those mistakes, that we can create something better out there on Proxima Centauri b. For now, though, I need to focus on what's ahead, the introduction meeting is about to start, and there's no turning back from here.

BBC In-Depth: "The Inevitable Path to World War III: A Global Crisis Brewing"

By Rebecca Marsh, BBC International Affairs Correspondent

As the world teeters on the brink of a third world war, analysts warn that escalating resource crises and geopolitical rivalries are creating conditions from which there may be no return. At the center of this impending catastrophe are two critical crises: Russia's deepening involvement in the African Water Wars and the looming depletion of global oil reserves. These developments, coupled with decades of environmental and political mismanagement, have set the stage for a global conflict that now seems inevitable.

The African Water Wars: A Global Powder Keg

For decades, Africa has faced worsening water scarcity as climate change has wreaked havoc on the continent. Rivers that once sustained millions are now running dry, leaving nations like Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Nigeria in bitter conflict over access to dwindling supplies. The African Water Wars, as they are now commonly called, have escalated into full-scale battles, leaving devastation in their wake.

In recent years, Russia has played an outsized role in these conflicts, turning the African Water Wars into a global flashpoint. Moscow has provided arms, funding, and private military contractors to factions willing to trade influence and resource access in return. While Russia claims to be aiding "stability efforts," Western powers and African governments accuse it of exploiting the region for geopolitical and economic gain.

"The Kremlin's actions are about securing leverage in a future defined by scarcity," said Dr. Elena Koslov, a political analyst.

“Water is becoming the new oil, and Russia understands that controlling it will be key to global dominance.”

China, heavily invested in African infrastructure through its Belt and Road Initiative, has cautiously criticized Russia's interference. However, Beijing has stopped short of any significant action, wary of jeopardizing its strategic foothold in the region. Meanwhile, Western nations, preoccupied with their own domestic crises, have struggled to formulate a unified response.

The Looming End of Oil

Compounding the crisis is the imminent depletion of global oil reserves. According to the World Energy Council, the world's recoverable oil is expected to run dry within the next decade. While renewable energy has made strides, oil remains vital for industries, transportation, and military operations.

The scramble for the remaining reserves has reignited old tensions in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia and Iraq, among others, have ramped up extraction efforts, seeking to maximize profits before the wells run dry. This has fueled regional instability, with Iran accusing its neighbors of monopolizing resources at the expense of long-term stability.

Russia, the world's second-largest oil producer, has used this opportunity to tighten its grip on global energy markets. By selectively limiting exports to Europe while strengthening ties with African oil producers, Moscow has created a chokehold on supply. This strategy has caused energy prices to skyrocket, prompting mass protests and calls for intervention across Europe and North America.

"The oil crisis is accelerating global unrest," said Dr. Marwan Idris, an energy economist. "When nations realize there isn't enough to go around, desperation sets in, and that's when conflicts become unavoidable."

Superpower Rivalries Reach a Breaking Point

The African Water Wars and the global oil crisis have intensified tensions between the world's major powers, pushing the geopolitical landscape toward collapse. The United States and NATO allies have increased military activity in Africa to counter Russian influence, while China remains cautiously positioned, protecting its investments without directly engaging.

Domestically, nations are grappling with unprecedented unrest. In the United States, food shortages and skyrocketing energy prices have led to mass protests, with the political divide deepening further. In Europe, far-right factions have capitalized on the crisis, demanding stricter borders and military action to secure resources. Even traditionally stable nations like Canada and Japan are experiencing unrest as citizens feel the ripple effects of a crumbling global order.

"We're witnessing a perfect storm," said General Alan Cartwright, a retired NATO strategist. "Resource shortages, political instability, and superpower rivalries are all converging. Historically, these are exactly the conditions that lead to war."

A Grim Prognosis

Efforts to prevent global conflict have so far been ineffective. The United Nations, hamstrung by its own structural limitations, has been unable to broker meaningful peace in Africa or elsewhere.

Economic sanctions against Russia have had little impact, and diplomatic talks between warring factions have repeatedly broken down.

Analysts warn that the world is running out of time. "The mechanisms we've relied on for decades to maintain peace are no longer functioning," said Dr. Koslov. "We're not just heading toward war, we're already in its early stages."

A Glimmer of Hope?

Amid this chaos, some view the New Earth Mission, the interstellar colonization effort bound for Proxima Centauri b, as a symbol of hope. While the mission offers no immediate solutions for the billions left behind on Earth, its supporters argue that it represents humanity's resilience, ingenuity and unity.

"We may not be able to fix Earth," said Dr. Idris, "but the New Earth Mission is proof that we haven't stopped trying to secure a future for humanity."

As the world braces for what seems inevitable, the hope for peace becomes more distant with each passing day. With water and oil serving as the catalysts, and human nature fueling the fire, World War III is no longer a question of if. It's a question of when.