# PROJECT LOGOS: A World Bible

## The Palimpsest City - Aethelburg

The world of PROJECT LOGOS is a palimpsest, a manuscript of history where the ink of one age has been scraped away to make room for the next, yet faint traces of the original text remain. To understand the neon-drenched streets and chrome spires of the present, one must first decipher the arcane ruins and forgotten histories that lie beneath. The city of Aethelburg is not merely a location; it is a layered artifact, a testament to the catastrophic transition from a world of intuitive magic to one of scientific sorcery.

### The Aethel Ascendancy & The Great Silence

Millennia before the current era, the world was dominated by the Aethel Ascendancy. This was not a monolithic empire but a sophisticated confederation of metahuman peoples—the graceful, long-lived progenitors of the modern Aethel-descended; the stoic, earth-shaping ancestors of the Stone-Forged; and various other kin—bound by a shared reliance on what they called the *Anima*, or what is now known as "Soul Magic." This power was not a tool to be wielded but a force to be harmonized with, an intuitive connection to the life-force of the world itself. Their society was one of magi-architects who sang mountains into new forms, artisans who wove starlight into fabric, and cities that breathed with a life of their own, their structures grown rather than built.

The Aethel saw themselves as "The People of the Song," believing their magic was a resonance with the fundamental vibration of existence. Their history, passed down in fragments of epic poetry and crumbling bas-reliefs, speaks of a golden age of balance and prosperity. Yet, this civilization was not destined to last. Its end came not with a bang, but with a whimper.

The cataclysm that ended the Ascendancy is known in apocryphal texts as "The Great Silence." It was not a war, an impact event, or a singular magical disaster. Instead, over the course of several generations, the *Anima* began to fade from the world. The song of existence grew faint, then quiet. Living cities sickened and turned to inert stone. Enchanted aqueducts ran dry. The deep connection that had defined Aethelian life frayed and then snapped, leaving them adrift in a world that no longer answered their call. This slow decay led to a catastrophic societal breakdown, marked by famine, internecine conflict, and a profound cultural despair as the very foundation of their reality crumbled away. This narrative of a slow fading, rather than a sudden destruction, echoes the themes of entropy and loss found in ancient apocalyptic myths like the Norse Ragnarök, where the world's end is a process, not a single event. The Great Silence left behind a world haunted by the ghost of magic, littered with the magnificent corpses of a forgotten age. This sense of profound loss, of a world that has lost its voice, is the psychological bedrock upon which the modern era is built. The desperate attempt to reclaim that lost power, by any means necessary, is the driving force of the current age.

### The Rise of Logos: The Age of Iron and Code

The centuries following the Great Silence were a brutal dark age. The survivors, stripped of their innate magic, were forced to rediscover the world through a new lens: that of empirical, dispassionate science. They learned to forge iron without incantations, to build with mortar instead of magic, and to rely on logic and mechanics to survive in a world that had fallen silent. This period, which historians call the "Age of Logos," mirrored the Industrial Revolution of other worlds. It was an era of profound and often violent transformation that reshaped society from the ground up.

Populations migrated from the crumbling, rural Aethelian ruins to burgeoning urban centers built around newly invented factories and power plants. A new social order emerged. The long-lived Aethel-descended, with their accumulated knowledge and remaining fragments of wealth from the old world, were uniquely positioned to become the new capitalist class, the owners of the means of production. The Stone-Forged, with their innate talent for engineering and craft, became the indispensable technical middle-class. And a vast, dispossessed working class formed from the ranks of all peoples, selling their labor for wages in often brutal conditions. This period saw the rise of consumerism, mass production, and a new way of life defined by the clock and the assembly line rather than the seasons and the flow of magic.

The pivotal moment of this new age was the scientific rediscovery of magic's fundamental principles. A consortium of thinkers, funded by the nascent corporate bodies, began to analyze the residual energies lingering in Aethelian artifacts. They did not seek to harmonize with the *Anima*; they sought to deconstruct it, to map its laws and quantify its forces. They discovered that the *Anima* was not a mystical spirit but a fundamental field of reality, governed by complex but predictable laws. They learned that this field could be manipulated, not through intuition, but through precise syntax, focused energy, and computational logic. They had not rediscovered Soul Magic; they had invented **Code Magic**. This breakthrough was hailed as the dawn of a new era, the moment humanity seized control of the forces that had once abandoned it. The Age of Logos had reached its apotheosis, setting the stage for the corporate-dominated world of the present.

### Aethelburg: Anatomy of a Tech-Noir Metropolis

The primary setting for PROJECT LOGOS is the sprawling metropolis of Aethelburg. The city's name itself is a fusion of its history, combining the ancient "Aethel" with the more modern "burg," reflecting the layers of civilization built one atop the other. Aethelburg is a city of stark contrasts, a vertical landscape where social status is measured in altitude. Its architecture is a jarring synthesis of the ancient and the futuristic: sleek corporate arcologies pierce the sky, their foundations sunk deep into the cyclopean ruins of Aethelian palaces, while holographic advertisements flicker across vine-choked, millennia-old statuary. The city is broadly divided into three major zones, each with its own distinct culture and dangers.

#### The Logos Sprawl (The Core)

The upper levels of Aethelburg are a monument to corporate power and technological order. This is the domain of the Atreus-Xylos Conglomerate (AXC) and its rivals. Gleaming towers of chrome and plascrete are connected by maglev sky-bridges, and the air is filled with the hum of corporate shuttles. Life in the Core is sterile, efficient, and under constant surveillance. Every aspect of existence, from sustenance to entertainment, is branded and provided by a corporate entity. The name "Logos Sprawl" reflects both the dominant philosophy of the age and the city's physical reality. Names for districts within the Core are often deliberately synthetic and aspirational, such as 'Prosperity Hub Alpha' or 'New Eden Sector,' masking a dystopian reality behind marketing language. This is the seat of power, a gilded cage for the corporate elite.

#### The Undercroft (The Ruins)

Beneath the gleaming Core lies the Undercroft, the vast, semi-subterranean ruins of the original Aethelian city. It is a labyrinth of crumbling, impossible architecture, where grand plazas lie buried in centuries of detritus and ancient magical constructs still wander forgotten corridors. The air here is thick with dust and the faint, lingering "echo" of Soul Magic. The Undercroft is a literal and metaphorical underworld, a place of secrets, danger, and forgotten power. It is home to outcasts, scavengers, and the secretive practitioners of Soul Magic known as the NumLocks. The name "Undercroft" is deliberately chosen to evoke the feeling of a space beneath a church, a once-holy place now buried and desecrated. It is Aethelburg's subconscious, a repository of its repressed history and trauma.

#### The Fringe Sectors (The Sprawl's Shadow)

Clinging to the edges of the Core and spilling down into the upper layers of the Undercroft are the Fringe Sectors. These are the overcrowded, polluted, and largely lawless tenement districts that house the city's vast working class and marginalized populations, particularly the Goblinized. Life in the Fringe is a constant struggle for survival amidst crushing poverty, industrial pollution, and gang violence. The architecture is a chaotic jumble of makeshift housing, repurposed industrial structures, and decaying Aethelian ruins. Names for the sub-districts are grimly descriptive, reflecting the harsh environment: 'Ash-Row,' 'Rust-Creek,' or 'The Sump'. The Fringe is the engine of Aethelburg's economy, providing the cheap labor that fuels the corporate machine in the Core, yet it is a world away in terms of quality of life.

## The Atreus-Xylos Conglomerate (AXC): The Architects of the Future

In the world of PROJECT LOGOS, power is not wielded by nations or governments, but by the monolithic entity that pioneered the scientific codification of magic: the Atreus-Xylos Conglomerate, universally known as AXC. To its supporters, AXC is the engine of progress, the force that dragged civilization from the darkness of the Great Silence and gave it the tools to master its own destiny. To its detractors, it is an all-consuming leviathan, a corporate state that has replaced political tyranny with the more insidious tyranny of the bottom line. AXC is more than a business; it is a philosophy, a government, and a military power rolled into one, the ultimate expression of the Age of Logos.

### Corporate Ideology: "Shaping a Better Reality"

The public-facing ideology of AXC is one of benevolent, rational control. Their ubiquitous slogan, "Shaping a Better Reality," is plastered on everything from consumer products to military hardware. This philosophy posits that reality, in its natural state, is chaotic, flawed, and prone to failure—as evidenced by the collapse of the Aethel Ascendancy. Code Magic, therefore, is presented as the ultimate tool of progress, a means to edit out the imperfections of the world, to eliminate disease, poverty, and uncertainty, and to build a perfect, logical, and prosperous society. Their marketing is relentlessly utopian, promising a future of boundless potential, all under the guiding hand of AXC.

This seductive vision masks a deeply totalitarian impulse. The "shaping" of reality is, in fact, the imposition of absolute control. The "imperfections" they seek to eliminate are free will, dissent, and any form of power that exists outside their corporate structure. The name "Atreus-Xylos" itself is a carefully constructed piece of branding. "Atreus" evokes the gravitas of a classical Greek dynasty, suggesting a legacy of power (while subtly hinting at tragedy and familial conflict), while "Xylos," the Greek word for wood, implies something foundational and structural. This blend of the classical and the technical is a common naming convention for cyberpunk megacorporations, designed to project an image of timeless authority and cutting-edge innovation. The corporation's language is a key weapon, using euphemisms and neologisms to mask oppressive practices behind a veneer of progress, a hallmark of dystopian control.

### Organizational Structure: The Corporate State

AXC's internal structure is not that of a traditional company, but of a sovereign state, a "total institution" that seeks to manage every aspect of its employees' lives. This structure is a new form of feudalism, where corporate loyalty replaces fealty to a lord, and employment contracts are as binding as any oath of vassalage.

* **The Board of Directors (The Oligarchy):** The true power behind AXC is an anonymous, seldom-seen council of the wealthiest and longest-lived Aethel-descended and human oligarchs. They are the new nobility, operating on a timescale incomprehensible to the masses, guiding the Conglomerate with centuries-long strategies. They are utterly detached from the consequences of their decisions on the ground.
* **The Chief Executive Officer (The Public Face):** The CEO is the charismatic and powerful public leader of AXC, responsible for day-to-day operations and strategic implementation. This position is currently held by the ruthless Kaelen Vorr (see Part VI). The CEO and other top executives form a knightly class, constantly jockeying for power and the favor of the unseen Board.
* **Divisions as Ministries:** AXC is divided into several powerful divisions, each functioning like a government ministry with its own vast resources, internal culture, and fierce rivalries.
  + **Research & Augmentation (R&A):** The scientific and technological heart of AXC. R&A is responsible for all research into Code Magic, as well as the development of the cybernetic and biological augmentations that are often required to wield it safely and effectively.
  + **Corporate Security (CorSec):** The military and police arm of the Conglomerate. CorSec fields a private army equipped with the latest military hardware and staffed by elite soldiers and combat-trained Coders. They are responsible for protecting AXC assets, enforcing corporate law in AXC territory, and conducting "hostile acquisitions" of rival assets.
  + **Information Control (InfoCon):** The propaganda and surveillance ministry. InfoCon manages the global media network, shapes public perception through sophisticated marketing and psychological operations, and maintains the vast surveillance network that monitors Aethelburg.
  + **Project Chimera (The Black Site):** The official existence of Project Chimera is denied by AXC, but it is the corporation's most vital and terrifying secret. This "black project" division operates outside of any remaining legal or ethical constraints, focused on the forbidden frontier of Code Magic: the direct and forceful fusion of arcane code with living, sentient beings. Project Chimera is the logical, unrestrained conclusion of AXC's ideology of "shaping reality." If reality can be perfected, so can life itself. The monstrous results of their experiments are the source of the setting's darkest secrets and the reason for the defection of key personnel like Dr. Aris Thorne.

### Assets and Operations: The Global Panopticon

AXC's power is woven into the very fabric of modern life. They hold monopolistic or near-monopolistic control over multiple critical markets, from energy and communications to military hardware and magical implements.

* **Infrastructure Control:** In Aethelburg, AXC owns and operates the power grid, the city-wide data network (the "Logos-Net"), and public transportation. This gives them the ability to shut down entire sectors of the city at will.
* **Global Reach:** While Aethelburg is their headquarters, AXC maintains a network of research outposts, manufacturing hubs, and resource extraction sites across the globe, many located in remote areas where they can operate with impunity.
* **Military Power:** CorSec is one of the most powerful military forces in the world, rivaling the armies of the few remaining nation-states. They possess advanced vehicles, energy weapons, and legions of cybernetically enhanced soldiers.
* **Product Lines:** AXC's influence is most keenly felt through its products, which have become ubiquitous. These range from consumer-grade "Logic Wands" (programmable magical focus tools), "Scribe" brand data-slates, and "Aegis" personal defense cyberware, to military-grade "Titan" combat platforms and the dreaded "Silencer" squads of CorSec assassins. This constant name-dropping of brands and products is a key element of the tech-noir genre, grounding the world in a hyper-consumerist reality where even the tools of rebellion are often corporate-made.

## The Duality of Power - A Comparative Analysis of Code and Soul Magic

The central conflict of PROJECT LOGOS is a war fought on two fronts: a physical war in the streets and ruins of Aethelburg, and a metaphysical war for the soul of reality itself. This conflict is embodied in the two opposing forms of magic that define the setting. They are not merely different sets of spells; they are fundamentally different philosophies, different ways of seeing and interacting with the universe. Understanding this duality is key to understanding the motivations of the world's major factions and the choices its inhabitants must make. The industrialization and commodification of Code Magic firmly places the setting within the "dungeonpunk" or "magipunk" subgenre, where magic is treated as a systematized technology, complete with consumer products and corporate R&D.

### Code Magic: The Logos Protocol

Code Magic, also known as the Logos Protocol, is the dominant form of magic in the modern era, pioneered and monopolized by AXC. It operates on a single, revolutionary premise: that reality is a programmable system, and magic is its source code. Practitioners, known as "Coders" or "Logicians," do not beseech or bargain with supernatural forces. They are arcane programmers who use a combination of technological focusing tools (cybernetically integrated casting matrices, data-gloves, complex focusing wands) and a rigorous syntax of verbal and somatic components to directly edit the fabric of existence.

The mechanical foundation of Code Magic is a "verb-noun" system, where a Coder combines a **Technique** (the verb, defining the action) with a **Form** (the noun, defining the target) to construct a spell effect. For example, a Coder might combine the Technique with the Form to generate a flame, or the Technique with the Form to perform a biological alteration. This system is incredibly versatile and powerful, allowing for precise, repeatable, and scalable magical effects. It is the power of science applied to the supernatural.

However, this power comes at a profound cost. The Logos Protocol is inherently unstable. Reality was not designed to be hacked, and forcing its code to execute unnatural commands creates stress on the system. Pushing a spell beyond its safe parameters, using "sloppy" syntax, or casting in an area where the fabric of reality is already thin can result in catastrophic failure. This core risk is known as **Reality Bleed**. Mechanically, this manifests as a form of corruption. When a Coder fumbles a spell or overcharges it with power, they risk generating glitches, paradoxes, or uncontrolled magical feedback. This can have devastating consequences, from localized reality distortions (e.g., gravity reversing in a room) to physical corruption of the caster (e.g., their flesh momentarily turning to static) or temporary insanity as their mind is flooded with raw, chaotic information. This mechanic is directly inspired by the "Perils of the Warp" from the *Warhammer* TTRPGs and the "Humanity Loss" mechanic from *Cyberpunk Red*, which represents the psychological toll of replacing one's natural body with machinery. In PROJECT LOGOS, Reality Bleed is the price of hubris, the metaphysical consequence of treating the universe as a machine to be commanded rather than a system to be understood.

### Soul Magic: The Numinous Art

In the shadows of the Undercroft and in hidden enclaves far from Aethelburg, a few secretive practitioners keep alive the ancient art of the Aethel: Soul Magic, or the Numinous Art. Where Code Magic seeks to command, Soul Magic seeks to commune. Its philosophy is diametrically opposed to the Logos Protocol. It posits that reality is not a dead, programmable system, but a living, semi-sentient entity—the *Anima*—with its own will and desires.

Practitioners of Soul Magic, known as "NumLocks" (from "Numinous," meaning divine or spiritual, and "Lock," as in a keeper of secrets), do not use technological foci or rigid syntax. Their power flows from their internal state: their empathy, their connection to the world around them, and their understanding of the emotional and spiritual "echoes" that linger in places and living things. Soul Magic is not about imposing one's will on reality, but about persuading it to change. A NumLock might coax a plant to grow, calm a frightened animal, heal a wound by encouraging the body's natural processes, or glean information from the psychic residue left on an object. It is a subtle, intuitive, and deeply personal art.

The power of Soul Magic is directly tied to the practitioner's spiritual and psychological well-being. This creates a unique mechanical and narrative risk: **Fading**. A NumLock who becomes too cynical, detached, cruel, or acts in a way that is fundamentally against the flow of life (e.g., wanton destruction, selfish acts) will find their connection to the *Anima* weakening. Their powers will become less reliable, more difficult to access, and in extreme cases, can abandon them entirely, leaving them as bereft of magic as any mundane. This mechanic is inspired by narrative-focused TTRPGs like *Mage: The Ascension*, where a mage's personal belief system (or "paradigm") is the lens through which they work magic. Fading is a duality-based mechanic, similar to the Morality systems in *World of Darkness* or *Star Wars: Force & Destiny*, where a character's actions have a direct and tangible impact on their spiritual power, forcing players to constantly weigh their actions against their principles.

### The Schism: Philosophy and Conflict

The conflict between Code Magic and Soul Magic is the philosophical heart of PROJECT LOGOS. It is a clash between two irreconcilable worldviews. AXC and its Coders see reality as a problem to be solved, a machine to be optimized. For them, Soul Magic is an archaic, unreliable superstition, the failed art of a civilization that allowed itself to be wiped out by a force it could not control. The NumLocks and the resistance see reality as a partner to be respected, a living spirit to be nurtured. To them, Code Magic is a violent, arrogant blasphemy, a practice that treats the world with the same cold, detached cruelty with which AXC treats its own people.

This schism raises the central questions of the setting: Is reality a system to be hacked or a spirit to be honored? Is the cold, predictable safety of control preferable to the messy, unpredictable beauty of freedom? Can the logic of the machine ever be reconciled with the soul of the world? The answers to these questions will be determined by the actions of the players as they navigate the secret war for Aethelburg's future.

| Feature | Code Magic (The Logos Protocol) | Soul Magic (The Numinous Art) |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Core Philosophy** | Reality as a System: The universe is a complex but ultimately understandable and programmable machine. | Reality as a Spirit: The universe is a living, semi-sentient entity (*Anima*) to be communed with. |
| **Source of Power** | External: Logic, arcane syntax, and technological focusing tools (cybernetics, data-gloves). | Internal: Intuition, empathy, and a deep connection to the life-force of the world and its "echoes." |
| **Practitioners** | Coders, Logicians, Tech-Witches, AXC Mages. | NumLocks, Mystics, Healers, Spirit-Talkers. |
| **Strengths** | Precision, raw power, versatility, technomancy, direct manipulation of matter and energy. | Healing, divination, influence over living things, stealth, emotional manipulation, subtlety. |
| **Core Risk** | **Reality Bleed:** Unstable magic can cause glitches, paradoxes, and physical/mental corruption in the caster. | **Fading:** Cynical, cruel, or detached actions weaken the caster's connection to the *Anima*, causing power loss. |
| **Metaphor** | Hacking a computer. | Tending a garden. |

## The Glitch in the System - The Underground Resistance

Opposing the monolithic power of the Atreus-Xylos Conglomerate is not a single, unified army, but a fractured and desperate collection of idealists, cynics, survivors, and revolutionaries. Known collectively as the Underground, this resistance movement is a patchwork of disparate factions, each with its own ideology, methods, and goals, united only by a shared enemy. Their struggle is not just for survival, but for the preservation of history, personal freedom, and the very soul of their world against the homogenizing force of corporate control.

### Ideology and Structure: A Patchwork of Dissent

The core ideology of the Underground is one of negation: they are defined by what they stand against. They oppose AXC's total control, its erasure of history, its dehumanizing technology, and its arrogant belief that reality can be perfected through force. Beyond this, however, their philosophies diverge wildly, creating a constant source of internal tension.

To survive against the overwhelming surveillance and military might of CorSec, the Underground has adopted a decentralized, cellular structure. This organizational model is directly inspired by historical resistance movements like the French Maquis during World War II, which relied on compartmentalization to prevent the capture of one member from compromising the entire network. The movement is composed of small, independent cells or "affinity groups" of fewer than a dozen individuals. These cells operate with a high degree of autonomy, communicating with other cells only through a few trusted liaisons. This structure makes the Underground resilient and difficult to eradicate, but it also hinders large-scale coordination and fosters an atmosphere of paranoia and mistrust. The greatest strength of the resistance—its diversity of skills, ideologies, and backgrounds—is also the source of its most profound weakness, as the factions are constantly on the verge of turning on one another.

### Key Factions: The Unlikely Alliance

The Underground is a tense coalition of three primary factions, each bringing unique assets and inherent conflicts to the alliance.

* **The NumLocks:** The direct inheritors of the Aethel's Soul Magic, the NumLocks are the spiritual heart of the resistance. They are a secretive, quasi-monastic order based in the deepest, most hidden parts of the Undercroft. Their culture is one of preservation, memory, and resilience, forged in the crucible of the Great Silence and the subsequent centuries of oppression during the Age of Logos. They see the fight against AXC not as a political struggle, but as a sacred duty to protect the *Anima* from the blasphemy of Code Magic. They act as healers, guides, and keepers of the old ways, offering sanctuary and wisdom to the resistance. Their culture is a powerful example of how an oppressed group can forge a strong identity through the celebration of its heritage and shared history as a defense against internalized oppression.
* **The White Mice:** This faction is the intelligence and logistics arm of the Underground. The White Mice are a clandestine network of corporate defectors, disillusioned scientists, anti-corporate hackers, and information brokers. They fight AXC not with magic, but with its own weapons: data, technology, and information warfare. Operating from hidden servers and safehouses, they execute daring data-heists, sabotage corporate infrastructure, and provide the rest of the resistance with vital intelligence, equipment, and forged credentials. Unlike the spiritual NumLocks, the White Mice are pragmatic and often deeply cynical, viewing the conflict through a lens of pure realpolitik. Their name is a classic moniker for covert operatives, suggesting their ability to move unseen through the systems of power.
* **The Gutter-Kin:** This is a collective term for the numerous street gangs, marginalized communities, and militant workers' groups that inhabit the Fringe Sectors. Comprised primarily of the Goblinized, the Gutter-Kin are the muscle of the resistance. Their motivations are rarely ideological; they fight for survival, for revenge against a system that has brutalized them, and for control of their own territory. They are masters of urban guerrilla warfare, scavenging, and the black market. While the NumLocks offer wisdom and the White Mice offer intelligence, the Gutter-Kin provide the raw manpower and street-level ferocity necessary to confront CorSec on the ground. Their faction names are evocative of their harsh environment, such as the "Rust Dogs," the "Sump Rats," or the "Scrappers," reflecting a culture built on pragmatism and survival.

| Faction | Ideology | Methods | Assets | Internal Conflicts |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **The NumLocks** | Spiritual Preservation | Soul Magic, Healing, Divination, Stealth | Safe havens in the Undercroft, ancient knowledge, spiritual guidance | Idealism often clashes with the pragmatic violence required by the war; deep distrust of technology. |
| **The White Mice** | Information Freedom & Anti-Corporate Action | Hacking, Espionage, Data-Heists, Sabotage, Technical Support | Infiltration networks in corporate structures, secure data havens, advanced (stolen) technology | Cynicism leads to friction with the NumLocks' faith; some members are motivated by profit as much as principle. |
| **The Gutter-Kin** | Survival & Revenge | Guerrilla Warfare, Street Violence, Scavenging, Black Market Operations | Manpower, intimate knowledge of the Fringe Sectors, established criminal networks | Tribal rivalries between gangs often undermine unity; distrust of "off-worlders" from the Core (the White Mice). |

## The Peoples of Aethelburg - A Metahuman Ethnography

The inhabitants of Aethelburg are the descendants of the high-fantasy peoples of the Aethel Ascendancy, but their identities have been reforged by centuries of technological revolution, corporate subjugation, and societal upheaval. The traditional delineations of "race" have been replaced by the more clinical corporate term "metatype," but old traits and cultural echoes remain, now expressed through the lens of a tech-noir world. This approach, heavily influenced by settings like *Shadowrun*, focuses on the sociology and culture of these peoples rather than on rigid biological determinism, exploring how societal pressures have shaped them into their current forms.

### The Post-Fantasy Condition

The Great Silence and the subsequent Age of Logos acted as a great equalizer and a great divider. The loss of universal magic stripped away the foundation of the old societies, while the rise of industrial capitalism created new hierarchies based on wealth and utility to the corporate machine. The innate characteristics of the old peoples did not vanish, but were instead adapted and recontextualized. A dwarf's affinity for stone and craft became a talent for civil engineering; an elf's longevity became an asset in long-term financial planning. The modern metatypes are defined less by their ancient heritage and more by the societal roles they have been forced into.

### The Aethel-descended (Elves)

The Aethel-descended are the metatype that most closely resembles the ancient Aethel. Tall, slender, and with lifespans stretching for centuries, their longevity has proven to be their greatest asset in the new world. They are the masters of the long game, capable of planning and executing corporate and political strategies that span generations. This has allowed them to secure a dominant position in the upper echelons of Aethelburg society, particularly within the leadership of AXC. They are often perceived by other metatypes as arrogant, emotionally distant, and manipulative, viewing the frantic, short lives of others with a mixture of detached pity and contempt. Their culture values subtlety, aesthetics, and the accumulation of influence over brute force. Naming conventions among the Aethel-descended are often complex, multi-syllabic, and may incorporate elements that sound classical or archaic, reflecting their connection to the old world. They are the new aristocracy, their power derived from stock portfolios and corporate leverage rather than ancestral lands.

### The Stone-Forged (Dwarves)

Compact, hardy, and possessing a legendary resilience, the Stone-Forged have found their niche deep within the technological heart of Aethelburg. Their traditional affinity for stone, metal, and intricate craftsmanship translated perfectly to the demands of the industrial age. They are the master engineers, technicians, mechanics, and infrastructure specialists who build and maintain the city's complex systems. The Stone-Forged are a tight-knit, clannish people, often living in self-contained communities in the deeper, more stable levels of the city, sometimes even repurposing ancient Aethelian foundations into modern habitats. Their culture is built on principles of hard work, tradition, loyalty, and an almost religious reverence for well-made machinery. They are generally apolitical and deeply distrustful of the surface world's machinations, preferring the predictable logic of a schematic to the chaotic whims of corporate politics. Their names are typically short, guttural, and feature hard consonants, often drawing from Norse or Germanic roots, a reflection of their cultural emphasis on strength and solidity.

### The Goblinized (Orks & Trolls)

The term "Goblinized" is a derogatory, pseudo-scientific label for those metatypes who emerged during the chaotic later years of the Age of Logos. Through a poorly understood biological phenomenon—perhaps a latent magical gene expression triggered by industrial pollutants or societal stress—many humans and other metatypes underwent dramatic physical transformations, becoming larger, stronger, and more physically imposing. These are the Orks and Trolls of Aethelburg.

From their emergence, the Goblinized have faced systemic prejudice and exploitation. Their physical prowess made them ideal candidates for the most grueling manual labor and dangerous security work, while their "monstrous" appearance made them easy targets for discrimination. As a result, they form the bulk of the population in the Fringe Sectors and constitute a significant portion of the city's underclass and criminal element. Their culture is a product of this oppression: a defiant, pragmatic, and fiercely communal identity forged in the face of adversity. They value strength, loyalty to one's kin, and the ability to survive against all odds. This shared struggle has led to the development of unique cultural expressions, from street art and music to a shared slang and, in some communities, the revival of a reconstructed ancestral language called Or'zet, mirroring similar developments in the *Shadowrun* setting. Their names are often simple, functional, or are street-names adopted as badges of honor.

| People | Common Archetype | Societal Role | Cultural Values | Naming Conventions |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Aethel-descended** | The Executive | Corporate Elite, Political Class | Long-term Strategy, Aesthetics, Influence | Multi-syllabic, elegant, classical-sounding |
| **Stone-Forged** | The Engineer | Technical Middle-Class, Master Artisans | Tradition, Craftsmanship, Clan Loyalty | Guttural, strong consonants, Norse/Germanic feel |
| **Goblinized** | The Bruiser | Manual Labor, Underclass, Street Muscle | Community, Survival, Strength, Defiance | Simple, descriptive, or adopted street names |

## Primary Actors - A Dossier of Key NPCs

The secret war for Aethelburg is driven by individuals whose choices and actions ripple through the city's delicate balance of power. The following dossiers provide insight into three primary actors who can serve as patrons, antagonists, and mentors. Each embodies a key archetype and theme of the PROJECT LOGOS setting, offering rich opportunities for roleplaying and plot development.

### The Defector: Dr. Aris Thorne (The Disillusioned Idealist)

**Background:** Dr. Aris Thorne was once a true believer. A brilliant human biogeneticist and arcane theoretician, he was a rising star within AXC's prestigious Research & Augmentation division. Recruited for his genius and unwavering faith in the corporate ideology, he was made a lead researcher in the top-secret Project Chimera. Thorne genuinely embraced AXC's mission of "Shaping a Better Reality," seeing Code Magic as the key to transcending human frailty and perfecting life itself. He worked tirelessly, pushing the boundaries of what was thought possible in the fusion of arcane code and living tissue.

His faith was shattered by the project's "successes." He witnessed firsthand the horrific cost of his research: sentient beings twisted into monstrous amalgams of flesh and corrupted code, their minds broken by the paradoxes of their own existence. These "Glitches," as the project termed its failures, were not aberrations but the inevitable outcome of an ideology that viewed life as a system to be debugged. The final straw came when he was ordered to begin trials on unwilling human subjects from the Fringe Sectors. Horrified, Thorne erased his research, stole a cache of incriminating data, and fled into the Undercroft. He is now a hunted man, wracked with guilt and paranoia, possessing secrets that could bring down AXC if he can only find someone he can trust.

**Character Arc & Role:** Thorne is the embodiment of the Disillusionment Arc. He began with a comfortable Lie—that science and corporate control could create a utopia—and was forced to confront a horrific Truth: that his work was creating monsters and that the ideology he served was fundamentally inhuman. His journey is a painful awakening. He is no longer the naive idealist but has not yet found a new purpose beyond survival and a desperate, unfocused desire for atonement. He serves as a key asset and quest-giver for the White Mice, but his deep-seated trauma and cynicism make him a difficult and unpredictable ally. He fits the tech-noir archetype of the "fallen hero" or the "innocent bystander" caught in a conspiracy far larger than himself, his specialized knowledge making him both a target and a vital resource.

### The Rival: Kaelen Vorr (The Ruthless Corporate Climber)

**Background:** Kaelen Vorr is the sharp, cybernetically-enhanced tip of AXC's spear. A high-ranking executive in the CorSec division, Vorr is an Aethel-descended who has fully embraced the new world of logic and power. He views the past with contempt and sees the resistance as a collection of sentimental fools and Luddite terrorists who stand in the way of progress. Vorr is a true believer in the corporate mission, but his faith is inextricably linked to his own ambition. He is a master strategist, a charismatic leader, and a formidable combatant, his natural grace augmented by military-grade cybernetics and a mastery of tactical Code Magic.

Vorr's primary motivation is the acquisition of power within the corporate hierarchy. He sees the secret war against the Underground not as a chore, but as an opportunity to prove his worth to the anonymous Board of Directors. He is utterly ruthless in his methods, willing to sacrifice his own troops, civilian populations, and what little remains of his own soul to achieve his objectives. He is not the ultimate villain of the setting—that would be the faceless Board—but he is the active, intelligent, and dangerous antagonist that players are most likely to face. He is the public face of their oppression.

**Character Arc & Role:** Vorr embodies the "ruthless rival" archetype. His arc is not one of change, but of escalation. With each success, he becomes more powerful, more influential, and more detached from any sense of morality. He is a dark mirror to the players, demonstrating the seductive power of the corporate world. He fits perfectly into the film noir archetype of the "corrupt official" or "powerful millionaire," a figure who wields institutional power as a weapon. His internal maneuvering against rivals within AXC is as important to him as his external war against the resistance, creating opportunities for players to exploit corporate infighting.

### The Mentor: 'Silas' (The Old One)

**Background:** Deep within the most ancient and inaccessible regions of the Undercroft lives a figure known only as Silas. He is a Stone-Forged, but one who is impossibly old—a direct survivor of the Aethel Ascendancy and a witness to the Great Silence. For millennia, he has lived as a hermit and a guardian, preserving the last untainted fragments of lore regarding Soul Magic. He saw his world die once, and this has imbued him with a profound, bone-deep pessimism. He believes the world is fundamentally broken and that the struggle against AXC is ultimately futile, a mere echo of a greater battle that was lost long ago.

Despite his fatalism, he continues to teach the Numinous Art to those few who seek him out, driven by a stubborn sense of duty to a world he no longer believes in. His lessons are as much about philosophy, memory, and coping with loss as they are about wielding power. He is cryptic, cantankerous, and demands absolute commitment from his students, for he has seen what happens when the connection to the *Anima* is taken for granted.

**Character Arc & Role:** Silas is the classic "ancient mentor" archetype. His character arc is largely static; he has already undergone his transformation and now serves as a catalyst for others. He is not an active combatant in the secret war but a living repository of the knowledge the resistance desperately needs. He provides the crucial historical and spiritual context that is absent from the cold, logical world of AXC. For players wishing to learn Soul Magic, he is the ultimate, if difficult, master. His pessimism and weariness serve as a constant challenge to the players' own hope, forcing them to define why their fight matters in the face of cosmic despair. He is the memory of the world, a grim reminder of all that has been lost.

## The Secret War - Campaign Frameworks & Story Hooks

PROJECT LOGOS is a setting designed for stories of espionage, survival, and rebellion in a world caught between a magical past and a technological future. The following frameworks provide a foundation for Game Masters to build campaigns that explore the core conflicts and themes of Aethelburg.

### Core Campaign Themes

Campaigns in PROJECT LOGOS can be built around several interconnected themes, allowing for a wide range of story tones and character motivations.

* **Humanity vs. Augmentation:** This central theme of the cyberpunk genre is explored through both technology and magic. How much of oneself can be replaced by chrome or rewritten by code before one ceases to be human? Code Magic's "Reality Bleed" and the psychological toll of cybernetics directly engage this question.
* **Memory vs. Progress:** The city of Aethelburg is a physical manifestation of this conflict. The resistance, particularly the NumLocks, fights to preserve the memory and wisdom of the past, while AXC is determined to erase it in the name of a "better" future. Is the past a foundation to be honored or a ruin to be demolished?
* **Freedom vs. Control:** This is the classic dystopian struggle. Players will constantly be confronted with the choice between the dangerous, chaotic freedom of the Undercroft and the sterile, oppressive security of the Logos Sprawl.
* **Hope vs. Cynicism:** In a grim tech-noir world, maintaining idealism is a revolutionary act. The journey of characters like Dr. Thorne and the teachings of a mentor like Silas force players to decide if hope is a strength or a foolish liability.

### Sample Story Arcs

These three sample arcs are designed to highlight different factions, locations, and gameplay styles within the setting.

* **"The Chimera Key":** An espionage and infiltration-focused campaign centered on the White Mice.
  + **Hook:** Dr. Aris Thorne contacts the players through a White Mice intermediary. He needs a team to break into a secure AXC R&A facility—a "black site" known as the 'Menoetius Lab'—to retrieve the complete, unredacted data logs for Project Chimera. This data is the "Chimera Key," proof of AXC's atrocities that could turn public opinion and corporate rivals against them.
  + **Gameplay:** This arc would involve data-heists on the Logos-Net, social engineering to acquire access codes, physical infiltration of a high-security corporate facility, and a desperate escape through the streets of the Logos Sprawl with CorSec forces in pursuit. It emphasizes stealth, hacking, and tactical combat.
* **"Echoes of the Silence":** A dungeon-crawl and mystery-focused campaign centered on the NumLocks.
  + **Hook:** Silas, the Old One, has sensed a weakening in the "Veil" that separates reality from the chaotic energies left behind by the Great Silence. He tasks the players with journeying deep into a major Aethelian ruin in the Undercroft, the 'Sunken Athenaeum,' to find and reactivate a 'Resonance Well,' a focal point of Soul Magic that can reinforce the Veil.
  + **Gameplay:** This arc is a "dungeonpunk" adventure, involving exploration of a vast, ancient ruin filled with malfunctioning Aethelian constructs, dangerous psychic phenomena, and pockets of warped reality. It emphasizes exploration, puzzle-solving, and survival horror elements as the players confront the lingering trauma of a world's death.
* **"The Sprawl's Fury":** A street-level political and combat-focused campaign centered on the Gutter-Kin.
  + **Hook:** AXC, under the command of Kaelen Vorr, initiates a brutal crackdown in the Fringe Sectors, using a new, non-lethal pacification weapon that leaves victims compliant but emotionally deadened. A charismatic Gutter-Kin leader hires the players to unite the warring street gangs into a cohesive fighting force to push CorSec out of their territory.
  + **Gameplay:** This arc involves navigating the complex politics of the Fringe Sectors, earning the trust of suspicious gang leaders, organizing supply lines, and executing urban guerrilla warfare operations against a technologically superior CorSec force. It emphasizes social skills, strategy, and intense, street-level combat, drawing on the tactics of historical resistance movements.

### TTRPG System Integration Notes

While PROJECT LOGOS is designed to be system-agnostic, its core concepts can be integrated into TTRPG mechanics to reinforce the setting's themes.

* **Code Magic:** A system that allows for creative spell construction, such as a "verb-noun" or point-buy system, would be ideal. To represent its inherent risk, a "Reality Bleed" or "Corruption" track should be implemented. Each time a Coder casts a spell, they might gain points on this track, with higher totals leading to random glitches, physical mutations, or temporary madness, similar to mechanics in *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* or *Symbaroum*.
* **Soul Magic:** This is best represented by a more narrative or freeform magic system. A practitioner's effectiveness could be tied to a "Conviction" or "Humanity" stat. When a character performs an act of cruelty, selfishness, or extreme cynicism, the GM could require a roll to see if they lose a point from this stat, temporarily or permanently reducing their access to Soul Magic.
* **Duality Mechanic:** A central "Logos vs. Anima" track could represent a character's alignment with the setting's core philosophies. Actions that favor ruthless efficiency, technology, and control (e.g., using lethal cyberware, executing a helpless opponent, selling out a contact for profit) would grant **Logos Points**. Actions that favor empathy, nature, and personal connection (e.g., healing an innocent, showing mercy, preserving a piece of history) would grant **Anima Points**. These points could be used as a resource to power certain abilities or could trigger narrative consequences as a character leans too far to one side, similar to the Hope/Fear or Morality mechanics in other TTRPGs. This would make every significant choice a mechanical reflection of the secret war for the world's soul.

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