

# **Nimona Study Guide**

**Nimona by Noelle Stevenson**

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# Plot Summary

Note: Due to the structure of this novel (a graphic novel), paragraph numbers refer to panel numbers.

“Nimona” is a young adult graphic novel by Noelle Stevenson which follows the adventures of Nimona as she serves as sidekick to the villainous Lord Ballister Blackheart, determined to overthrow the Institute of Law Enforcement and Heroics, believing them to be corrupt. Ballister agrees to take on Nimona upon learning she is a shapeshifter. He can use all the help against Sir Ambrosious Goldenloin, Champion of the Institute, and hero in the public eye. Ballister harbors deep hatred for Goldenloin, for the two used to be friends at the Institute years before. Following a joust that he lost to Ballister, Goldenloin cruelly shot off Ballister’s arm. With no use for a one-armed hero, Ballister was thrown out and became a villain.

Ballister and Nimona come to get along very well. He is a man of science and morals, while she is a girl of magic and passions. Ballister, though a villain, operates on a moral code, killing only when absolutely necessary. The two have several encounters with Goldenloin as they raid research facilities and rob a bank, giving money to the poor. Ballister also develops a nonlethal poison to make people sick to blame the Institute. Secret files Nimona steals from the Institute reveal the Institute has begun a weapons program using jaderoot, a very rare and very poisonous outlawed plant. It is all the proof Ballister needs to demonstrate the Institution is corrupt. Nimona transforms herself into a news anchor and reveals this information to the public.

Goldenloin cannot get ahead of Ballister and Nimona, and must report his failures to the Director of the Institute. The Director calls for the assassination of Nimona and Ballister, but Goldenloin doesn’t want to become a cheap assassin. The Director threatens his job and promises Ballister will live if Goldenloin can capture him and kill Nimona. Goldenloin reluctantly agrees to this new plan, laying a trap for Ballister and Nimona at the Royal Joust. The trap fails, and Goldenloin is replaced. When two people die of illness, Ballister blames himself and heads to the hospital to give those still suffering the antidote. After this, he is captured without a fight by forces of the Institute. While he is in prison Ballister receives an apology from Goldenloin for the past. When Nimona attempts to rescue Ballister, she is captured and imprisoned.

To escape, Nimona splits herself in half. Her anger becomes a dragon that wreaks havoc in the City, killing the King, the Director, and many more. With the help of the Anomalous Energy Enhancer, Goldenloin attempts to subdue the dragon by sucking away its energy. Goldenloin is severely wounded. Meanwhile, Ballister finds Nimona’s other half. She explains it is dangerous to split herself in half, because the weaker half always loses and disintegrates. Ballister seeks to force both halves to reconcile, but he is unable to calm the dragon. In the end, he must kill the dragon. He believes this means that Nimona has been killed, but Nimona survives. She visits Ballister only briefly before disappearing in a crowd. Ballister hopes he will see her again one day, and she

will know him as a friend. Goldenloin and Ballister, meanwhile, become friends once again.

# Chapters 1 – 3

## Summary

Chapter 1 – Villain Lord Ballister Blackheart meets Nimona, a feisty redheaded girl who seeks work as Ballister’s sidekick. Ballister insists he does not need a sidekick, but hires Nimona when he learns she is a shapeshifter.

Chapter 2 – Ballister unveils a plan to Nimona which involves kidnapping the King from the downtown parade with genetically modified dragons, demanding ransom, then flying off and exploding the building behind them for emphasis. Nimona says the plan should involve killing the King, killing Sir Ambrosius Goldenloin, and destroying the city. Ballister says there are rules, and that he just can’t go around murdering people. He says that if anyone will kill Goldenloin, it will be him. He reveals that he and Goldenloin used to be best friends at the Institute of Law Enforcement and Heroics, but after a joust which Ballister won fairly and cleanly, Goldenloin attacked Ballister, taking off his arm. Ballister reveals that Goldenloin maintained it was an accident, though no one could prove otherwise. The Institute, Ballister explains, had no use for a one-armed hero, so they kicked him out after which time he became a villain. He explains the rules he follows are his own, and that to him, it isn’t about winning, but proving a point.

Chapter 3 – Nimona and Ballister break into the Institute’s finest Research Facility, full of dangerous substances. They are confronted by Goldenloin and three guards. Goldenloin is interested to learn that Ballister has a new sidekick. Before Ballister can stop her, Nimona shapeshifts into a wolf and a little girl, killing two of the guards and scaring the third off, who raises the alarm. Nimona chases after him, during which time Goldenloin and Ballister duel. They are stopped by a voice over the loudspeaker which announces the lab will self-destruct in ten minutes. Goldenloin pulls Ballister to safety, though Ballister does not want to leave Nimona. The lab explodes. Ballister is saddened, believing Nimona has died. She calls him a few hours later, revealing she has broken into the Institute and stolen a file of secret plans.

## Analysis

“Nimona” is a young adult graphic novel by Noelle Stevenson which follows the adventures of Nimona as she serves as sidekick to the villainous Lord Ballister Blackheart, determined to overthrow the Institute of Law Enforcement and Heroics, believing them to be corrupt. From the start of the novel, the theme of heroism can be seen in what first appears to be a battle of good and evil. The evil villain, Ballister, seeks to bring down the heroes and their Institute, led by the heroic Sir Goldenloin. Ballister’s feud with the Institute goes back years, to when he, too, was training to be a hero, and when he was best friends with Goldenloin. Ballister was cruelly and savagely attacked by Goldenloin after defeating Goldenloin in a joust. Tossed out by the Institute, which had no use for a one-armed hero, Ballister became a supervillain.



Already, the theme of morality can be seen at play as well through friendship and heroism. The supposedly heroic Goldenloin immorally resorted to a cheap shot that cost Ballister his arm and his opportunity to be a hero. This also ended their friendship. Meanwhile, Nimona's conceptions of morality – that villains do evil and nothing more – will be challenged in coming chapters. Here, it is briefly dealt with in the planning stage: Nimona wants to kill the King and wreak havoc, while Ballister says that no one should be killed. This confounds Nimona, who believes killing is the work of a villain. She is further stunned by Ballister's argument that he follows rules. Ballister is a moral absolutist, even though he is a villain. This is much of his dual nature at play – and dual natures will become important thematically as the novel continues.

Likewise, the concept of heroism and villainy, morality and immorality, are challenged by the duel between Goldenloin and Ballister. The reader should note that Goldenloin – who both seeks to defeat Ballister and cost Ballister his chance at being a hero – pulls Ballister to safety during the research facility's self-destruction. It is possible that Goldenloin feels bad about the past, or that he seeks to uphold whatever remains of his friendship with Ballister. Goldenloin, as the reader can surmise through this act of saving Ballister, is seeking to redeem himself for the past. Redemption will become an incredibly important theme as the novel progresses.

## Discussion Question 1

Why is Nimona so shocked to learn that Ballister follows rules and seeks to avoid killing?

## Discussion Question 2

In what ways are Ballister and Goldenloin presented so far as non-traditional heroes and villains? Why do you believe this is?

## Discussion Question 3

Despite Nimona's mysterious appearance, why does he agree to hire her as his sidekick?

## Vocabulary

shapeshifter, genetically-modified, emphasis, volatile, infiltrated, uncharacteristically



# Chapters 4 – 6

## Summary

Chapter 4 – Nimona returns home. Ballister tells her she was reckless, nearly got them killed, and killed many other people in the explosion. Nimona argues that villains kill people sometimes. Ballister counters that killing solves nothing, that if killing must be done, it must be done for a very good reason, and the killer must be prepared to accept responsibility. Killing cannot be done just because. Ballister tells Nimona she can help plan their next move if she shows a little more restraint. She agrees. Ballister tells her he is impressed by her shapeshifting abilities. She explains that when she was six, her village was targeted by raiders. She reveals that she found an old witch trapped in a hole in the ground who gave her the power of shapeshifting in exchange for help out of the hole. Nimona explains that she transformed into a dragon to defend her village against the raiders, but by then, it was too late. The village had been destroyed. Meanwhile, Goldenloin meets with the Director of the Institute, who is stunned that Ballister now has a shapeshifter on his side. The Director says this cannot be allowed.

Chapter 5 – Ballister is intrigued by Nimona's shapeshifting abilities, wanting to know the science behind it. Nimona contends simply that it is magic. She reveals she is allergic to bananas. Ballister wants to run some tests, which causes Nimona to lash out and say she is nobody's lab rat. Ballister realizes something else must have happened to Nimona in the past. They begin going through the Institute's files. They learn that the Institute is trying to use and store jaderoot. Jaderoot is a very rare and very poisonous plant that is extremely corrosive and hard to control. It is used only in dark sorcery. Ballister and Nimona learn that the plant is being used by the Institute even though the Institute outlawed its use a long time ago and even growing it could poison the crops of the people. Nimona says that Ballister was right, that the Institute is indeed crooked. Ballister contends they must get rid of the jaderoot. Nimona morphs into an anchorwoman to deliver a report on the Institution and jaderoot on television. The Director denies it as a hoax. That night, Nimona falls asleep while watching a movie. Ballister covers her up with his cape.

Chapter 6 – Ballister crafts a nonfatal potion to give people illness through apples that will make them doubt the Institute. Nimona plants the apples throughout the city. Ballister and Nimona head to His Majesty's Royal Treasury Bank to conduct a robbery. Nimona deals with the guards, taking care not to kill any of them. Ballister uses a vaporizer to blow open the vault. Nimona is then sent to the roof to shift into a dragon to clear the Square of onlookers. Outside, Goldenloin and the city guards arrive just as Nimona becomes a dragon. The people back up, during which time Ballister destroys the wall of the bank. He and Nimona flee with gold while the people rush in to take the gold that has spilled into the square. Nimona is shot in the leg with an arrow, which Ballister tends to back at their lair. He tells her that villainy isn't a game. Nimona counters that she has been taking care of herself for a long time. The illnesses break out. The people of the city riot and wonder whether they should trust the Institute



anymore. The Director blames Goldenloin. She orders the killing of Nimona, even though Goldenloin does not want to kill a young girl. The Director contends that if Goldenloin wants to keep his job, and Ballister as his archn-emesis, he will do as told.

## Analysis

Nimona's return after the research facility fiasco brings about strong warnings from Ballister. Here, the theme of dual nature in conjunction with the theme of morality is again on display. Ballister, the archvillain, argues for moral restraint and killing only when absolutely necessary. It is a very responsible position for a villain to take – but demonstrates a depth of character. Likewise, the rules that Ballister follows are his own. They are not couched in the idea that the ends justify the means, but in that the means themselves do count. To carry out his plan of ensuring the public sees the truth about the Institute, Ballister delivers nonlethal poison around the city to back up his claim that the Institute is dealing in jaderoot. The reader should also note that Ballister has Nimona clear the square before breaching the bank wall so that nobody is hurt in the process.

Heroism and morality are once again thrown on their heads in Chapter 6. The Director of the Institute of Law Enforcement and Heroics orders the assassination of Nimona. Heroes are not murderers. Even Goldenloin is initially repelled by this utterly immoral and unheroic demand. Yet, he has no choice but to give in on order to retain his hero status. For the Director, the ends justify the means. For Goldenloin, even though he has moral reservations about killing Nimona, he recognizes that he would much prefer to keep his job. The ends – keeping his job – justify the means – killing Nimona. It is a very unheroic thing to do.

The reader should also note that Ballister and Nimona have come to complement one another in many ways. Ballister is a man of science, reason, and is emotionally distant. Nimona is a girl of magic, faith, and passion. They have a good effect on one another. Niomana gets Ballister to warm up, while Ballister gets Nimona to temper some of her passion into reason. The two work very well together in their crimes as a result.

## Discussion Question 1

What does Ballister have to say about killing and following his own rules? Why is this important to him?

## Discussion Question 2

In what ways to Nimona and Ballister complement one another? How do the strengths of their characters help each other?





## Discussion Question 3

Why does Goldenloin have moral concerns about killing Nimona? Why does Goldenloin agree to kill her anyways?

## Vocabulary

restraint, edible, verified, inanimate, discredit, superficial, nontoxic, morals, incompetence, arch-nemesis



## Chapters 7 – 9

### Summary

Chapter 7 – Ballister and Nimona are delighted with how their plan is unfolding. Nimona believes they will be victorious, while Ballister tells her she has proved her worth. Nimona decides to cook a celebratory dinner. Goldenloin calls, wanting a meeting in person. Ballister goes out to meet him at the Antlered Snake. Goldenloin tells Ballister to get rid of Nimona because the Institute has ordered Goldenloin to kill her. Ballister isn't surprised the Institute is resorting to killing children. Goldenloin repeats that Ballister must get rid of Nimona so things can go back to normal. Ballister says Goldenloin gave up normal at the joust, while Goldenloin contends it was all an accident. Goldenloin goes on to say that Ballister never had it in him to be a hero. The two end up fighting. Ballister gains the upper hand, and considers cutting off Goldenloin's arm, saying the Institution would cast him aside quickly. He says he never would do it, even though Ballister is the villain. He asks what that says about Goldenloin. Ballister then heads home.

Chapter 8 – Knowing the evening has put Ballister in a bad mood, Nimona decides to take him to the Science Expo. Nimona disguises herself as a cat while Ballister dons a beard. At the Expo, Ballister becomes fascinated by the Anomalous Energy Enhancer, which seeks to find the source of magical energy. It will reconcile science and magic. Suddenly, the Enhancer malfunctions. It attracts the attention of the guards who give chase to Ballister, while also preventing Nimona from transforming back from a cat. Nimona flees, tripping off a destructive laser beam that destroys much of the Expo. Nimona is knocked out in an explosion. However, this allows her to shapeshift once again when she regains consciousness. Nimona and Ballister flee. Back home, she worries she is losing her powers. Ballister offers to help however he can, which enrages Nimona due to past broken promises of help. She destroys the kitchen as a result.

Chapter 9 – Nimona dyes her hair purple. Ballister asks her if she is okay, telling her he knows something happened to her in the past. She says she is fine. Meanwhile, the Director orders the death of Ballister as well as Nimona. Goldenloin argues that Ballister should be captured, and the illnesses pinned on him. He argues that killing Ballister will make him a hero. The Director doesn't want to hear it, and again threatens Goldenloin's job. Goldenloin is not thrilled with being tasked with assassinations, but strikes a deal: Ballister will be allowed to live if Nimona is killed. He is given cutting edge robotic armor and a squad of troops with similar outfits. They set a trap for Nimona at a Royal Tournament. A riot breaks out when it is learned that someone has eaten poisoned food. Guards rush in. Ballister then hijacks the audio systems and televisions, delivering a message declaring the Institution corrupt, declaring the power of the people has been taken away, and declaring that it is time to take it back. The people rebel against the guards while Goldenloin and a unit of guards battle Nimona and Ballister. Ballister kills a guard to save Nimona's life. She transforms into a dragon, has her head cut off, but still lives. Goldenloin and Ballister are both seriously hurt but survive the fight. Ballister and



Nimona flee. The Director tells Goldenloin he is being replaced, and fighting Nimona is no longer the plan.

## Analysis

As further proof that the complementarity Nimona and Ballister have is benefitting both of them, Nimona's loyalty to Ballister, and Ballister's approval of Nimona's work are fitting. They have come to rely on one another in ways neither has relied on anyone before. They are indeed friends at this point. However, the past comes back to Ballister as Goldenloin arranges to meet with him at the Antlered Snake. Relying on whatever shreds of friendship remain between them, and relying on their friendship in the past, Goldenloin warns Ballister about the orders to kill Nimona. Goldenloin contends that he doesn't want to kill her, but will do what he must in order to survive. It is, once again, very unheroic.

This decision – to kill Nimona if he must – once again demonstrates the immorality that creates a dual nature to Goldenloin. He is outwardly a hero, but inwardly villainous to consider killing a teenaged girl to save his job. Additionally, Goldenloin's underhanded attack of Ballister decades before demonstrates a moral absence in Goldenloin. The theme of morality emerges front and center as Ballister and Goldenloin commit to a fight, which Ballister wins. Ballister explains he could easily cut off Goldenloin's arm. Ballister says he won't, even though he is the villain. It is a stunning revelation that the villain will not harm the hero, even though the hero is willing to harm the villain. The ultimatum that Goldenloin himself is given rises another level – he can kill Nimona, or Ballister will be killed.

Interestingly enough, despite Goldenloin's immoral antics, his decision to get Ballister to meet with him is another attempt at redemption, half-hearted but good-intentioned though it may be. He seeks to redeem himself for the arm incident years before by attempting to save Nimona by having Ballister fire her. However, this warning that Nimona's life is in danger ends up being less redemptive as Goldenloin's pride gets the better of him in the fight. Interestingly enough, Ballister will not fire Nimona, and goes to the great length of actually killing a man to stop him from killing Nimona. It demonstrates the level of friendship that now exists between Ballister and Nimona.

## Discussion Question 1

Why must Goldenloin kill Nimona? How does Goldenloin feel about this task?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Goldenloin get Ballister to meet him at the Antlered Snake? How does this meeting end? Why?



## Discussion Question 3

When Ballister has the chance to cut off Goldenloin's arm, he refuses to do so. Why?

## Vocabulary

anomalous, enhancer, infinite, reconcile, accord, paranoid, appease, mongered, compliance



# Chapter 10

## Summary

Nimona brings word that all the rioters have been locked up, the news channels are being censored, and that two people have died of illness. This stuns Ballister, who is ready to give up on villainy. He says everything changed when Nimona showed up. He realizes that Nimona has made up the entire story about the witch at the bottom of the hole. Ballister wants to know who, and what Nimona really is. Nimona becomes angered and leaves. Ballister then contacts Dr. Meredith Blitzmeyer, asking her about her knowledge of shapeshifters. It would appear that Nimona is both a shapeshifter and a doppelganger. The story of Gloreth is related, who slayed just such a monstrous shapeshifting beast. Meredith goes on to contend that shapeshifters could surely be genetically modified, and that any shapeshifter making itself known must have a reason for doing so. Ballister then sneaks into the hospital, giving the antidote to those who have been sickened. Ballister is taken captive by the guards.

Goldenloin is assigned to watch Ballister. Ballister reveals Nimona is gone. Goldenloin confesses the joust wasn't an accident, that the Director promised him the role of Institute Champion if Ballister could be defeated. Goldenloin was given a weaponized lance to do so, which he used to blow off Ballister's arm. He apologizes for the first time ever for it. Ballister is brought before the Director. The Director reveals the Institute is preparing for war, even though the Kingdom is not at war. It is then revealed that Nimona has been captured in an alloy sphere full of jaderoot. Analysis shows that every time Nimona changes form, every single cell in her body dies and new ones are formed. Goldenloin protests how Nimona and Ballister are being treated, but is told to be silent by the Director who likens Ballister and Nimona to a terrorist and a weapon. Nimona says she is not a weapon, is not an abomination, and that she was born how she was.

Nimona then uses a blood sample that has been collected from her to wreak havoc outside the sphere as a dragon. The Director and her men evacuate. Goldenloin tells Ballister that Nimona can't be helped, and drags Ballister out to safety while Nimona's blood dragon destroys the Institute and then heads to the City. Goldenloin believes Nimona can no longer be reasoned with, while Ballister wants to try. Goldenloin says that Nimona has always been a killer, and that nothing Ballister can do will change that. Goldenloin rushes to the City to help people evacuate as the dragon rages. Goldenloin is told not to challenge the dragon until Ballister has secured "the device". Meanwhile, the dragon attacks the Palace and kills the King.

## Analysis

Here, there is yet another moral twist to the story. Ballister is sickened by the fact that two people that have consumed his poison have died, in addition to the fact that the overall plan to bring down the Institute seems to have failed. Ballister decides to give up



villainy because he can no longer claim to be making a moral stand if people have died. Just before Ballister is captured, he journeys to the hospital to deliver an antidote to ensure those still ill will survive and return to good health. It further reflects the dual nature of his character, and demonstrates once more the sheer strength of his moral quality.

When Ballister is captured, Goldenloin is assigned to guard him. At long last, Goldenloin finally apologizes to Ballister for the past. The reader may be suspicious of Goldenloin's apology, coming only after Goldenloin's downfall. Either the downfall caused Goldenloin to genuinely seek redemption, or caused Goldenloin to seek redemption merely as a matter of convenience because he no longer has a position as hero to defend. Regardless, Ballister takes the apology to heart, and accepts it. The two begin working together at this point to free Nimona, to bring down the Institute, and to save the City from destruction by Nimona's doppelganger. Whatever Goldenloin's motives in apologizing, his quest for redemption is now truly underway as he seeks to do truly moral things. The Institute, meanwhile, is exposed as corrupt in that it is preparing for a war that is not going on, and in its widespread use of jaderoot. All of the power the Institute has been drawing unto itself, and the immoral and unheroic things it is doing, lead to the need for its destruction.

## Discussion Question 1

Do you believe Goldenloin apologized because he had nothing left to lose, or because he was genuinely changed and moved to do so? Why?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Goldenloin ultimately decide to help Ballister, even though he has been fighting Ballister for most of the novel? Does Ballister accept Goldenloin's help? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Ballister decide to stop being a supervillain? What does he do next? Why?

## Vocabulary

regeneration, slew, atrocious, fraternizing, susceptibility, abomination



# Chapter 11 – Epilogue

## Summary

Chapter 11 – Ballister goes to see Dr. Meredith Blitzmeyer about the shapeshifter. Both realize that the beast Gloreth supposedly killed never actually died – but is Nimona. Ballister asks to borrow the Anomalous Energy Enhancer. Meredith agrees so long as the Anomalous Energy Enhancer is not wrecked. Ballister delivers the device to Goldenloin. Meanwhile, the Director personally fights the monster with a jaderoot firearm. She is no match for the beast, who destroys her. Goldenloin then arrives to do battle. The Anomalous Energy Enhancer saps away the energy of the monster, making the fight more even. In a flashback, Nimona is shown as a 6-year-old girl whose parents believed she had been replaced by a foul creature. It is shown that Nimona was taken to a lab and cruelly experimented on until she rebelled and fled. In the present, Ballister rescues Nimona's other half, which has become a version of her 6-year-old self. She explains it is dangerous to split herself, and that the weaker half always dies.

Ballister and Nimona arrive at the fight between Goldenloin and the beast just as the beast is winning. Ballister tries to reason with Nimona and the beast, but the beast declares no one can help her; and that people have promised to help her and let her down. The beast turns on Ballister, forcing Ballister to kill it. The news carries word of Ballister and Goldenloin destroying the beast, and of popular support for shutting down the Institute. Ballister, recovering at the hospital, is heartbroken that he has lost Nimona, and may lose Goldenloin. However, Ballister discovers a doctor who visits is actually Nimona in disguise. She smiles and disappears in the hospital.

Epilogue – Ballister and Blitzmeyer begin a research institute together. Goldenloin continues to recover, and he and Ballister resume their friendship. Ballister hopes that he'll see Nimona again one day, and that she'll know him as a friend.

## Analysis

As the novel concludes, the theme of dual natures emerges front and center by way of Nimona. Her dual nature literally becomes physical as she splits in two. Her passionate and anger appear in the form of the dragonish monster that attacks the City, while her innocence and goodness appear as her childlike self. Both sides dominate for control of Nimona's existence. Yet it is Ballister who must make a morally-challenging, conscience-wringing decision in the end by choosing to kill Nimona's darker half. In effect, he is killing Nimona because he is destroying a part of her. Nimona, by all appearances, seems to perish in the destruction that follows. Fortunately, Nimona survives.

The fall of the Institute also brings about the revival of the friendship between Ballister and Goldenloin. Goldenloin has indeed truly redeemed himself by seeking to defend the



City, and by assisting Ballister in his stopping Nimona. Goldenloin has truly returned to the moral side of heroism, and is indeed applauded as a moral hero in the media. Ballister himself is elevated by his efforts to stop Nimona and bring down the Institute. He himself becomes known as the hero that he has always truly been.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why does Ballister ultimately decide to kill the monstrous half of Nimona? How does he feel about doing so? Why?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What are Nimona's two halves? Which does she believe will ultimately win out? Why?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why do you believe Nimona chooses to disappear rather than to stay?

## **Vocabulary**

prototype, flagging, casualties, clamoring, stockpiling, disbanding





# Characters

## Nimona

Nimona is the eponymous hero of the graphic novel “Nimona” by Noelle Stevenson. Nimona is a shapeshifting doppelganger, who has the ability to change into any living creature, and to divide herself in half. Nimona appears to be in her teens, is short, slightly overweight, and has a mostly-shaved head with pink hair. Nimona sneaks into Ballister’s fortress where she aspires to be the villain’s sidekick. Nimona’s passion and rage at having been treated so horribly in the past lead her to want to commit acts of destruction and violence, but she learns through Ballister to take a moral approach to villainy. She sets out with Ballister to take down Sir Goldenloin and the Institute because they are corrupt. While trying to free Ballister from the Institute, Nimona herself is captured. She must split herself in two to escape, with her anger and rage taking on the form of a monstrous dragon that kills the King and terrorizes the City. This monstrous half is undone by Ballister himself. Nimona’s other half ultimately disappears into a crowd after letting Ballister know she is alright.

## Ballister Blackheart

Lord Ballister Blackheart is the seemingly arch-villain of the novel. Strikingly for a villain, Ballister lives by a moral set of rules that act as his compass. He agrees to take on Nimona for a sidekick due at first to her shapeshifting abilities, and then later keeps her on because she becomes so central to his life and his plots. Ballister is the former best friend of Goldenloin, having had a falling out with Goldenloin while Ballister studied to be a hero at the Institute. Having been mercilessly attacked by Goldenloin after winning a joust, Ballister lost an arm and was kicked out of the Institute. As a result, he became a villain. He spends the novel working to bring down Goldenloin and the corrupt Institute. He succeeds, and ultimately resumes his friendship with Goldenloin.

## Sir Goldenloin

Sir Ambrosius Goldenloin is the seeming hero of the novel. The Champion of the Institute, Goldenloin leads their forces against Ballister, thwarting Ballister’s plots. Goldenloin is very proud, and hates to lose at anything. As a result, he will do immoral things to get his way. He is former best friends with Ballister, having studied with him to be heroes at the Institute. After losing a joust to Ballister, Goldenloin mercilessly shot off Ballister’s arm. Goldenloin claims it was an accident, and is believed by all but Ballister. Goldenloin is ultimately assigned to kill Nimona, though he has qualms about a hero assassinating anyone. Nevertheless, he agrees to do it to preserve his job. When he is unable to carry out his tasks, he is removed from his position, apologizes to Ballister, and seeks to help Ballister save the City. Goldenloin and Ballister ultimately become friends again.



## The Director

The Director of the Institute of Law Enforcement and Heroics is a cold, calculating woman who will do whatever she must to guarantee her power, and the privilege of the Institute. This includes forcing Goldenloin to attempt to kill Nimona. The Director is ultimately scorched to death by the fire-breathing Nimona when she escapes the clutches of the Institute.

## Meredith Blitzmeyer

Dr. Meredith Blitzmeyer is a student of science and magic who seeks to reconcile both in her work. She is the inventor of the Anomalous Energy Enhancer, which taps into magical energy and can take it away. Meredith is sought out by Ballister for help in stopping Nimona, and by Ballister for information about shapeshifters.

## Goldenloin's replacement

Goldenloin's replacement is a brutal and thuggish guard from the Institute. Never named, the replacement has no qualms about hurting people, and doing whatever is needed to get the job done. He lauds this over Goldenloin, callously telling Goldenloin that he now outranks him.

## The King

The King is a gentle, kind, but absentminded soul. Only ever seen on television addressing the public during disasters, the King is seemingly well-loved and well-respected. However, his absentmindedness means the Institute has been taking power unto itself, with the probable goal of overthrowing the King. The King himself is ultimately killed by Nimona's monstrous half toward the end of the novel.

## Nimona's human parents

Nimona's human parents are only ever briefly referred to in the novel, but they are not truly Nimona's parents. When their 6-year-old daughter seems near death, she suddenly makes a full recovery. This leads them to suspect that their daughter has been replaced by a shapeshifter, so they turn the daughter – now Nimona – over to science.

## The doctor

The doctor at the hospital is never named but appears a few times throughout the novel. She is very good at her job, and has an inquisitive mind. She questions whether there is truth to the rumor that the Institute is using jaderoot, and is later impersonated by Nimona to gain access to Ballister.

## **Tabitha and Diego**

Tabitha and Diego are two residents of the City. They have a conversation wherein they question whether or not they can truly trust the Institute. Their conversation is reflective of numerous conversations that occur across the breadth of the city after Nimona impersonates a news anchor to expose the Institute.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Mechanical arm

A mechanical arm is the defining physical characteristic of Ballister. The arm replaces the real arm that he lost at the hands of Goldenloin's underhanded cheap shot after the joust years before. The mechanical arm daily serves as a reminder to Ballister of everything he has lost, and symbolizes everything he seeks to gain – the overthrow of Goldenloin and the Institute.

## Weaponized lance

A weaponized lance is given to Goldenloin for use in his joust against Ballister. The weaponized lance is essentially a small rocket launcher that fires projectiles. After losing the joust to Ballister, Goldenloin uses the lance to blow off Ballister's arm.

## Secret Institute files

Secret Institute files are discovered by Nimona when she infiltrates the Institute. She brings the files back to Ballister's lair, where she and Ballister study them together. Among other things, the files reveal jaderoot use and experimentation, which is the proof that Ballister needs to declare the Institute corrupt.

## Jaderoot

Jaderoot is a very rare and very poisonous plant that is extremely corrosive and hard to control. It is used only in dark sorcery. Ballister and Nimona learn that the plant is being used by the Institute even though the Institute outlawed its use a long time ago. This proves the Institute is corrupt.

## Vaporizer

A vaporizer is wielded by Ballister in the novel. The vaporizer uses a projectile of destabilizing energy to destroy massive obstructions and structures. Ballister uses the vaporizer to blow a hole in the wall of the bank, making possible his and Nimona's escape, and making possible the return of taxed gold to the citizens.

## Poisoned apples

Poisoned apples are distributed by Nimona throughout the city. The apples contain a nonlethal poison which is designed to undermine the Institute's claim that it is not using



jaderoot. The poison apples work, causing the public to turn against the Institute. However, two people end up dying from the apples, leading Ballister to walk away from being a villain.

## **Antidote**

An antidote for the nonlethal poisoned apples is developed by Ballister to cure those who fall ill. The antidote is kept by Ballister until it is learned that two people die unexpectedly. Ballister is brokenhearted by having unintentionally killed two innocent people, so he delivers the antidotes to those still sick before being captured.

## **Anomalous Energy Enhancer**

The Anomalous Energy Enhancer is a device invented by Meredith Blitzmeyer. It is a spherical object designed to tap scientifically into the world of magical energy. The device draws from such energy, and can return it. The Enhancer is used by Goldenloin during his fight with Nimona's monstrous half in order to try to draw down her power.

## **6-year-old Nimona**

A 6-year-old version of Nimona becomes one of her two shapeshifting, doppelganger halves. This half represents her innocence, gentleness, and kindness. Nimona believes that this half of herself will lose out, as the weaker half of her split self always loses out. However, Ballister ensures that this is not so by slaying the monstrous half of Nimona.

## **Dragon-Nimona**

A monstrous dragon version of Nimona becomes one of her two shapeshifting, doppelganger halves. This half represents her anger, rage, and the abuse she suffered at the hands of scientists years before. This half of Nimona appears to consume her existence until it is destroyed by Ballister.

# Settings

## The City

The City serves as the main setting for the novel. The City is highly futuristic, has commercial and residential areas, is composed of skyscrapers and modern buildings intermixed with medieval-styled buildings and castles. Its residents wear a mixture of medieval and modern clothing. The City is run by the King, with law enforcement being upheld by the Institute. The City is home to Goldenloin and to Ballister, and becomes a battleground between them. Much of the city is destroyed late in the novel when Nimona's worse half wreaks havoc in the form of a monstrous dragon.

## Ballister's Lair and Fortress

Ballister's lair consists of a secret fortress that the reader is never told how to get to. These whereabouts are known about by the Institute and by Goldenloin, however. The fortress exists in the City itself, making Ballister's access to conducting villainous plots all the more easy. The fortress is also very comfortable, for it has a kitchen, living room, and bedrooms. The fortress is where Nimona comes to stay when Ballister hires her.

## The Institute of Law Enforcement and Heroics

The Institute of Law Enforcement and Heroics is the foremost institution in the City. Its purpose is to mold young men and women to become either superheroes, law enforcement agents, or guards for the City. The Institute includes a fortress, a headquarters, and several research facilities all overseen by the Director. Goldenloin is the face of the Institute, and its lead hero and champion. Ballister himself is a former student of the Institute, though he now aspires to bring the Institute down. By the end of the novel, the Institute has been destroyed by Nimona, and has been exposed for its use of jaderoot.

## His Majesty's Royal Treasury Bank

His Majesty's Royal Treasury Bank is the largest bank in the City, full of millions of dollars of gold coin. The bank is robbed by Ballister and Nimona. It is where Nimona first exercises strong restraint and does not kill any guards, and is where Ballister first employs the vaporizer. A hole in the bank's outer wall is blown by Ballister so the citizens may rush in and reclaim the gold that has been taxed away from them.

## The Hospital

The Hospital is the City's foremost medical facility. It is where the unnamed Doctor works her shifts, and is where Goldenloin is taken twice after being injured. The hospital is the place where Goldenloin begins his recovery at the end of the novel. The hospital is broken into by Ballister to administer the antidote to those ill, and the hospital is where Ballister is captured.



# Themes and Motifs

## Morality

Morality is an important theme in the novel “Nimona” by Noelle Stevenson. Morality – what is ethically right or wrong, ethically just and unjust – is fiercely examined in the novel. This is done in conjunction with the theme of heroes. Morality is also examined philosophically between the characters of Ballister and Goldenloin.

When the novel begins, the reader assumes that the heroes are morally just while the villains are morally wrong. As it quickly turns out, this understanding of morality isn't correct. As seen through Ballister, who refuses to kill anyone unless absolutely necessary, and who hates to harm anyone at all even accidentally, morality is a very important thing. Ballister's moral rules are his own, and he sticks to them without fail through the novel. Goldenloin, however, is not the hero that he seems to be. He is willing to do dirty things to win and achieve what he wants. This includes blowing off Ballister's arm and agreeing to kill Nimona in order to save his own job.

Ballister is a moral absolutist. He believes there is right and there is wrong, that there is little between, and that he must always strive to be morally right. By this token, he believes that the means must justify the ends. In other words, the process of getting to the goal is just as important as the goal itself. Goldenloin, on the other hand, is a moral utilitarian. Goldenloin believes the ends justify the means. In other words, the process can be whatever it has to be to achieve the desired goals. Only at the end of the novel does Goldenloin recant his immoral past and seek to be a better, more moral person in the future.

Nimona herself undergoes important moral changes in the novel. When the novel begins, she assumes that good is good and evil is evil. She is stunned to learn this is not the case. Nimona is taught a strict system of moral beliefs by Ballister, who ensures that Nimona harms no one unnecessarily. Nimona has such difficulty discerning right from wrong originally because over the past several years, she herself was cruelly experimented on by men of science claiming to be on the side of good. This caused a moral crisis in Nimona, who came to believe that committing evil acts was not actually evil, but morally justifiable.

## Heroism

Heroism is an important theme in the novel “Nimona” by Noelle Stevenson. Heroism – doing what is brave and courageous, even if the situation looks bleak and chances of success are slim – is critical to the characters of Ballister and Goldenloin. Heroism deeply affects the course and plot of the novel.

The Institute for Law Enforcement and Heroics exists in order to train heroes to uphold the law and vanquish villainy. It is expected by the public that heroes will always perform





courageous acts in the name of upholding morality and justice. While figures like Goldenloin may certainly perform brave acts, their morality is questionable. For example, Goldenloin's heroics are sharply undermined by his immoral behavior – such as agreeing to kill Nimona, a teenaged girl, to keep his job. The fact that such an arrangement is being forced by the Director of the Institute – who should arguably be the most heroic of all – is troubling. Likewise, an Institute of Heroes that will not accept a one-armed hero is disturbing.

Meanwhile, the villains seem to be far more heroic than the heroes themselves do. Ballister, for example, will never kill anyone unless absolutely necessary, and will go out of his way to avoid harming anyone during his villainous exploits. Likewise, when Ballister does commit to a plot, it is always done with a moral reason behind it. Robbing the bank to fund his efforts to bring down the Institute also leads to the money of hardworking taxpayers being returned to the taxpayers.

As the novel draws to a close, Ballister and Goldenloin truly emerge in the heroic image as they must do battle with the classic situation of a monster destroying the city. Ballister and Goldenloin both do the heroic thing by battling Nimona's dark half to save the city. Indeed, Goldenloin first risks his life to help people flee before taking on Nimona. Ballister himself risks his life to attempt to talk Nimona down, before having to slay her darker half. As a result of these heroics, many lives are saved and the city is rebuilt.

## Friendship

Friendship is an important theme in the novel "Nimona" by Noelle Stevenson. Friendship itself is central to the plot, and to the lives of the characters of Ballister, Nimona, and Goldenloin. The past friendship between Ballister and Goldenloin, and the currently unfolding friendship between Nimona and Ballister, proves essential to the novel's outcome.

Ballister and Goldenloin once both studied at the Institute, where they became best friends. However, Goldenloin's pride and his desire to be the best at whatever cost – in addition to wanting to be the Champion of the Institute – led him to blowing off Ballister's arm after Ballister defeated Goldenloin in a match. This resulted not only in Ballister being kicked out of the Institute because the Institute had no use for a one-armed hero, but in the end of the friendship between Ballister and Goldenloin. Ballister thereafter turned to villainy.

Goldenloin attempts to convince himself over the years that the attack was not an attack at all, but merely an accident. He never apologizes for that even, however. Goldenloin does miss his friendship with Ballister, and this is in part what motivates him to meet with Ballister to tell Ballister to lose Nimona. He knows Nimona means a lot to Ballister, and doesn't want to have to kill Nimona – and thereby harm Ballister. Ballister reveals this is more proof of Goldenloin's underhandedness. Only when Goldenloin apologizes



and sides with Ballister to defeat Nimona's dark half can their friendship continue at the end of the novel.

At the same time, Ballister – who has no real friends of his own anymore – slowly warms up to Nimona. She makes his life better, provides him with company, and becomes much more than merely his sidekick. They genuinely come to care about one another, and help each other to grow where they are weakest. Nimona gets a better sense of morals through Ballister, while Ballister embraces compassion through Nimona. Nimona risks her life to ensure that Ballister is freed when captured as a result of the loyalty of friendship.

## Redemption

Redemption is an important theme in the novel “Nimona” by Noelle Stevenson. Redemption is the effort to atone for past perceived and committed wrongs, evils, and failures. In the novel, redemption mainly becomes a matter for Goldenloin, and to a lesser degree, for Ballister.

In the past, Ballister and Goldenloin were best friends at the Institute. But Goldenloin's pride, desire to be the best, and desire to win at any cost ultimately led him to blow off the arm of Ballister during a joust, to ensure that Ballister lost. Goldenloin later feels guilty about this because it destroys his friendship with Ballister, but is not troubled enough to make amends. He argues that the attack were merely an accident, yet won't even apologize for this. His half-hearted attempts at redemption – warning Ballister of Nimona's targeting, and agreeing to kill Nimona if Ballister will be allowed to live – are pathetic excuses rather than genuine efforts.

Only when Goldenloin is fired and ordered to guard Ballister in prison does Goldenloin finally seek full redemption. Whether Goldenloin apologizes to Ballister merely because he has nothing left to lose, or whether Goldenloin has had a genuine change of heart is not clear. But what matters is that Goldenloin does indeed apologize, and seeks to make things right by action as well as word. He commits to saving the City with Ballister, agreeing to work with him rather than against him. Through his efforts, Goldenloin finds redemption and is labeled a hero.

Ballister must also undertake a small redemptive journey himself. In his efforts to prove that the Institute is corrupt, he develops a nonlethal poison and antidote to make some people in the city sick. When two of these people die unexpectedly, Ballister is devastated. Rather than continue the charade, he sneaks into the hospital and delivers the antidote to all those still ill before being captured. Ballister also walks away from villainy for good, for he does not wish to harm anyone else. His turning his back on his past, making things right for those still surviving the illness, and defending the City from Nimona, are true measures of redemption.



## Dual Natures

Dual natures form an important theme in the novel “Nimona” by Noelle Stevenson. Dual natures, thematically, essentially indicates that each person has two sides or natures. This is true of Nimona, Ballister, and Goldenloin alike. The dual natures of these individuals demonstrates a tremendous depth of character, and makes the characters very much human.

Nimona’s nature for most of the novel is either one of confidence or deep defensiveness. There is no in-between. She is either totally into the plans and operations she and Ballister hatch and carry out, or she is deeply troubled and hurt, and doesn’t want to talk about her past. As Ballister learns, this is due to the scientific experiments carried out on her as a child. Nimona’s nature morally is also seen dually late in the novel when she splits herself. Her innocence, gentleness, and kindness appear in her child form, while her anger, rage, and hurt appear in monster form. In the end, it is Nimona’s goodness which wins out.

Ballister’s nature for much of the novel is that of a man of moral absolutism, which is a stark contrast to his identity as a villain. Despite his schemes and plans to bring down the Institute, he wants to do so without harming anyone he doesn’t have to. As a villain, he follows a set of moral rules. Nimona herself is very surprised that Ballister, the arch-villain of the City, should abide by a moral set of laws without deviation. Ballister also presents a somewhat distant, cold figure who is more focused on the task at hand than anyone around him. Part of this comes from the betrayal suffered at the hands of Goldenloin, and part from the fact that he is a villain. However, Nimona’s presence in Ballister’s life causes him to warm up and to care about someone beyond his villainous aspirations. This can be seen mostly clearly in Ballister’s determination to try to save, rather than kill Nimona at the end of the novel.

Goldenloin himself is a deeply complex character. Appearing as a hero of high moral quality, Goldenloin is secretly flawed. His pride, jealousy, and love of winning compel him to shoot off Ballister’s arm at the joust years before the novel. He then becomes something of a utilitarian, doing whatever he must to retain his image as the best hero in the City. This includes his willingness to kill Nimona. However, Goldenloin finally finds his moral center when he tries to subdue Nimona’s beast without killing her.

# Styles

## Point of View

Noelle Stevenson tells her novel “Nimona” without a narrator, using illustrations, actions, and the words of the characters themselves to drive the story. The reader becomes a constant observer of all things that occur in the novel, being able to see the things characters do and say firsthand. There is no middle-man, no narration between the reader and the story. This allows the reader to have a firsthand and personal look at the words and deeds of the characters, and allows for tremendous character development. As a result, in some way, the novel is told from the point of view of each of the three main characters themselves – Nimona, Ballister, and Goldenloin. This allows the reader to truly understand each character, and where they are coming from.

## Language and Meaning

Though Noelle Stevenson tells her novel “Nimona” without a narrator, the language employed by her characters is a mix of casual and heroically epic in nature. This is done for several reasons. First, the casual language is reflective of the time in which the novel has been written and is originally being read (the 2010s). Likewise, the causal language is geared toward an audience of young adults. Given the nature of the plot – one involving heroes and villains – it is only fitting that epic and heroic language be utilized as well. Words like “infiltrate”, “arch-nemesis”, “accord”, and “disbanding” are used, while epic phrases like “Halt, you villains! Unhand that science!” are used as well.

## Structure

Noelle Stevenson divides her graphic novel into eleven linear, numbered chapters from Chapter 1 to Chapter 11. Some chapters, such as 10, are quite long (48 pages in length) while others, such as 1, are quite short (only a few pages in length). The graphic nature of the novel comes through the story being told in full-color illustrations and in the words of the characters themselves. The illustrations allow the plot to weave back and forth between the pursuits of, and events in the lives of the characters of Nimona, Ballister, and Goldenloin. This creates depth to the novel, as the reader is given the opportunity to truly understand each character in turn.



## Quotes

You can't just go around murdering people. There are RULES, Nimona.

-- Ballister (Chapter 2 paragraph 13)

**Importance:** Nimona hatches a plot of killing the King and killing Goldenloin. She is stunned to discover that Goldenloin and Ballister used to be best friends, until Goldenloin seemingly betrayed Ballister after a lost joust by tearing off Ballister's arm with a firearm. He explains to her that his villainy isn't about winning, but proving a point, and that his rules – such as not murdering people – are his own.

She grows on you.

-- Ballister (Chapter 3 paragraph 12)

**Importance:** Confronted by Goldenloin at the lab, Goldenloin is interested to see that Ballister has a new sidekick. Goldenloin calls her spunky, while Ballister explains that she has grown on him. This reveals that Ballister has come to appreciate Nimona, and to value her work in villainy.

Killing someone solves nothing, Nimona. It's vulgar, it's messy – if you're going to kill someone, you'd better be sure. You'd better be prepared to accept responsibility. So I don't KILL people just because they're in my way.

-- Ballister (Chapter 4 paragraph 15)

**Importance:** After the science lab fiasco, Ballister lectures Nimona about randomly killing people. He takes the side of villainy with a set of moral rules that he follows very closely. He explains that killing should rarely, if ever, occur - and only then for a good reason. Nimona simply can't go around randomly killing people.

It's magic! Can't you just accept it and move on?

-- Nimona (Chapter 5 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** Nimona and Ballister converse about Nimona's shapeshifting abilities. Ballister wants to know the science behind it, while Nimona explains it is merely magic, and Ballister must accept it and move on. This demonstrates the differences between Nimona and Ballister, which causes them to be a dynamic duo: Ballister is facts-and-science based, while Nimona is faith-and-magic based. They complete each other as a villainous team.

Oh, right. MORALS.

-- Nimona (Chapter 6 paragraph 93)

**Importance:** When Nimona and Ballister rob His Majesty's Royal Treasury Bank, he tells Nimona to clear the Square outside. This allows Ballister to blow apart the bank wall, effect an escape with Nimona, and prevent people from being killed. Nimona half-agrees, and half-disagrees, throwing Ballister's concern about innocent bystanders to



morals. This demonstrates that Ballister, though a villain, is a moral person. It also reveals Nimona is growing more morally-conscious as well.

DISPOSE of the sidekick.

-- The Director of the Institute (Chapter 6 paragraph 205)

**Importance:** The Director of the Institute has had enough following the bank robbery, the illness, and dealing with Nimona. Public opinion is now against the Institute. The Director is angered, knowing that Nimona has been helping Ballister tremendously. She orders the killing of Nimona at whatever cost, threatening Goldenloin's job and friendship with Ballister.

But THIS time you have me!

-- Nimona (Chapter 7 paragraph 9)

**Importance:** Nimona is very convinced that she and Ballister will win the war against the Institute in the end. Ballister explains he has never won before. Nimona contends that now, he has her to help him and will win. This underscores how important Nimona has become to Ballister, and underscores just how desperately the Director wants to kill Nimona.

You have certainly proved your worth.

-- Ballister (Chapter 7 paragraph 10)

**Importance:** Ballister and Nimona are thrilled with how their plans are coming off. Nimona believes victory will be possible. Ballister compliments her, telling her she has proved her worth. This underscores just how much Ballister has come to depend on Nimona, and demonstrates how necessary she is in the grand scheme of things.

No, I wouldn't. And I'm the villain. What do you suppose that says about you?

-- Ballister (Chapter 7 paragraph 80)

**Importance:** After meeting up with Goldenloin and getting into a fight with him, Ballister gains the upper hand and rhetorically considers cutting off Goldenloin's arm. He says the Institute would cast Goldenloin aside just as quickly as they cast him aside. Ballister says he would never do such a thing to Goldenloin, however, even though Ballister is the villain. This is continued evidence that as a villain, Ballister is more moral than Goldenloin, a hero. It also demonstrates the discerning of morality in the novel: Who is actually good and who is actually evil?

Guarantee the termination of the sidekick, take Blackheart into custody, and he will live.

-- The Director (Chapter 9 paragraph 30)

**Importance:** The Director at first wants Goldenloin to kill both Nimona and Ballister, but Goldenloin does not want to do so. He misses his friendship with Ballister, and prefers Ballister alive. Goldenloin is given a deal. If he captures Ballister and kills Nimona, Ballister will be allowed to live. Goldenloin has no choice but to agree.



You ARE the strong part, okay?  
-- Ballister (Chapter 11 paragraph 101)

**Importance:** Ballister learns from Nimona that whenever she splits herself in two, the weaker part always disintegrates. Ballister assures her that the form in which she is now – not the beast she has unleashed – is the strong part. Ballister will do whatever he can to ensure Nimona survives.

I can only hope that if she does come back... She'll know me for who I am. A friend.  
-- Ballister (Epilogue paragraph 10)

**Importance:** As the novel ends, Ballister and Goldenloin resume their friendship. Goldenloin continues to recover from his injuries, and Ballister wonders if he'll ever see Nimona again. She has come to mean so much to him that he feels her absence greatly. He hopes that one day she will come back, and that she will know him for who he truly is - a friend.