

Ben X

By Mitchell Gatt

Ben (Greg Timmermans) has what could be described as a mildly severe case of autism: he is unable to understand the normal social cues that most people seem to learn while growing up. He often loses himself in the online game universe of *Archlord*. Online, he is an ogre-slaying knight in shining armour, with his 'healer' and love interest, Scarlite. He feels important when he plays this game, in contrast to the real world, where he is often the target of school bullies Desmet (Maarten Claeysens) and Bogaert (Titus De Voogdt). Things heat up quickly after Ben is filmed by his classmates with his pants ripped down. The video is leaked on the Internet, and Ben suffers greatly.

Greg Timmermans's portrayal of the autistic teen is exceptional. Having studied closely, taking note of every detail, one couldn't tell the difference if he were compared with an autistic child. The portrayal of the heartless bullies must also be commended.

Ben X is definitely not for the weak of heart. There are moments throughout this film where you curse writer-director Nic Balthazar for creating characters that you either love and pity or loathe and fear. Aimed at those over fifteen years old, it includes suicidal themes as well as moderate levels of violence and coarse language.

Controversial, confronting, and seemingly unparalleled, *Ben X* is a different film, just as Ben himself is different. It explores numerous important concepts in disturbing, eye-widening ways and deserves as big an audience as it can lay its hands on.