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Lost and Found in Translation

By Josef Woodard, November 9, 2006

Borat!

Sacha Baron Cohen and Ken Davitian star in a film written by Cohen, Anthony Hines, Peter Baynham, Dan Mazer, and Todd Phillips and directed by Larry Charles.

Reviewed by Josef Woodard

Infamous right out of the box, *Borat!* dares to ask the cinematic question: If the world is careening toward oblivion, why not go down laughing? Shameless provocateur Sacha Baron Cohen's capital-H hilarious film comes out at a time when we desperately need some blows to the temple of our over-serious outlook as a species. *Borat!* (full title, *Borat!: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*) is the politically incorrect, low-humor, feel-good hit of the season.

Kazakhstan is the biggest butt of the film's complex joke. Borat is a bungling but determined Kazakh TV journalist sent to America to learn of its ways. In a Christopher Guest-like mockumentary style, Borat — the irrepressible and hypnotically in-character Sacha Baron Cohen — is seen in zany encounters with Americans. But Americans generally don't seem amused by his outlandishness, which then amps up the humor content.

With his corpulent producer, Borat sets out, with wide eyes, diaper-like *chones*, and signature moustache to discover America. They buy an old ice cream truck and hit the road west, like the pioneers, but armed with the power of cluelessness. Along the way, Borat manages to slaughter the sacred cow, buy a pet bear, and casually heap satirical scorn upon Jews, Southerners, gays, feminists, African-Americans, and of course, Kazakhs (curiously, Pentecostal tent-brand Christianity comes away relatively unscathed). *Borat!* is a fairly equal-opportunity offense-giver of a film, which, of course, helps soften the blows and keep it all in the realm of hyper-leivity.

We love Borat because he's seemingly guileless in his pursuit of knowledge, and also his pursuit of Pamela Anderson, who he sees in a red swimsuit on an N.Y.C. television and suddenly knows his mission is to go to California and marry her. When Anderson, gamely part of the script, expresses other ideas at a book-signing, Borat pleads, "But I'll give you your own plow!" The film is well-stocked with lines qualifying as vernacular in the making, including the term "make sexy time" (i.e. having sex) or "having a romance explosion on her stomach," and a reference to our supreme leader as "the mighty warlord, Premier Bush."

With this wild film, Cohen/Borat has upped the ante of satire to the point where the air gets thin from too much convulsive laughter. Recriminations and real life uproar can be dealt with later.