

Borat Sagdiyev

This article refers to the [Sacha Baron Cohen](#) character Borat. For the film, see [Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan](#).

[Sacha Baron Cohen](#) acting as Borat

Borat Sagdiyev ([Kazakh](#) and [Russian](#): **Борат Сагдиев**) is a fictional [Kazakh journalist](#), created and portrayed by the English comedian [Sacha Baron Cohen](#).

Humor is often derived from Borat being a foreigner and having strange customs, thoughts, and behavior. There is also a lot of toilet humor in the series. Borat [hates Gypsies](#) and is also [Anti-Semitic](#).

Origins of Borat

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The Borat character first appeared in short clips on [F2F - The Granada Talk TV Show](#) that [Sacha Baron Cohen](#) presented in 1996-1997.

Borat's life and family

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Borat was born in the fictional village of Kuzcek, [Kazakhstan](#) to Asimbala Sagdiyev and Boltok the town [rapist](#) (who is also his mother's father). He has a 13-year-old son named HooeyLewis and 12-year-old [twin](#) boys named Biram and Bilak, as well as 17 grandchildren. He has an older sister named Natalya (whom he has claimed at different times to be either "the number four" or "number two [prostitute](#)" in Kazakhstan) and a younger brother, Bilo, who is [mentally retarded](#). It is revealed that he has a second wife in addition to a [mistress](#), a [girlfriend](#) and a prostitute.

Borat is shown to have been married several times, after first having been betrothed to his [half-sister's](#) [plough](#) while in his teens. His first wife [Oksana](#) was reported in the *Borat* movie to have been "broken" by a bear while taking his brother Bilo for a walk in the forest. The death of Borat's wife did not bother him; he thanks the man who brings him this "good news" — and celebrates by trying to marry [Pamela Anderson](#) and eventually reuniting with Luenell, a [black](#) prostitute he met while filming his documentary.

Borat is a professional journalist and announcer on Kazakh television. According to various in-character interviews with [Sacha Baron Cohen](#), Borat learned at [Astana](#) University, where he studied [English](#), [journalism](#), and [plague](#) research. He claims to have created five new plagues which supposedly "killed over 5 million goats and whores in Uzbekistan."^[1]

Before this Borat was an ice maker, animal sperm retriever, gypsy catcher, and someone who removes dead birds from a computer.^[2]

Borat was a [pagan](#) for most of his life. However, in the movie he attends a [Pentecostal](#) church service and later converts his village neighbors to Christianity.

Borat greatly admires [Joseph Stalin](#), and claims that both he and Stalin are strong men with powerful "khram" (genitals). He hates [women's rights](#) and was surprised to learn that women can [vote](#) in some countries. In his spare time, he enjoys playing [ping pong](#), [sunbathing](#) while wearing a lime green "[mankini](#)", [disco](#) dancing, [spitting](#), sitting on comfortable chairs, and taking pictures of women while they "make toilet".

Da Ali G Show

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Borat is shown in each episode of *Da Ali G Show*, doing funny interviews with real people in the United Kingdom and the United States. The segments were shot in low-quality video to make fun of how poor Kazakhstan is and how it cannot afford good cameras. Of [Ali G](#), Borat comments on his website, "I appear on Alee G shows-He idiot, but it give me lot of girls & pickles; I like..."

The Borat segments on *Da Ali G Show* use a [rock and roll](#) version of the Russian folk tune "[Korobeiniki](#)" as the theme song.

Guide to Britain

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Was part of a six-part Ali G show originally on Channel 4 (UK) in March 2000.

Five Borat sketches were shown: "Etiquette", Hunting, [Cambridge](#), [Edinburgh](#) and [Henley](#). The "Guides" to "English Gentlemen", "Politics" and "Sport" were also filmed at this time but released later as part of *Ali G* DVDs.

Borat Special

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A special shown on the E4 launch night (UK) in January 2001 known as "The Best of Borat."

Some of the best parts were the "Guide to Sport" and a some video of Borat's village in Kazakhstan. Though the village they used was really in Romania.

Guide to USA 1

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Shown as part of a six part *Ali G Show* originally on HBO (USA) in February 2003.

Six Borat sketches were shown in the form of "Guides" to "Dating," "Etiquette," "Acting," "Men," "Baseballs," and "The (Deep) South." A "Guide to Animals" was filmed, but released at a later date as part of an *Ali G* DVD. [Alyssa Greenfill](#) was also in it.

Guide to USA 2

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Shown as part of a six-part *Ali G Show* originally on HBO (USA) in July 2004. (C4 was the UK channel where Ali G and Borat originally appeared, and the series for America was a HBO/C4 co-production).

Six Borat sketches were shown: "Wine Tasting", "Politics", "Country Music", "Hobbies", "Buying a House" and "Jobs" (careers). A "Guide to Hunting" was filmed but only aired in the UK because it bothered [animal rights](#) people in America.

Ali G Indahouse

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Borat appeared in the Ali G movie *Ali G Indahouse* as a Kazak diplomat. Borat greets Ali G with a hug and kiss, but Ali pushes him away. Borat then calls Ali a "[cocksucker](#)". In the end, Borat performs a [hip-hop](#) song with superstar Max Allard.

The "Movie Film"

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See the main article: [Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan](#)

Borat promoting his film at the 2006 [ComicCon](#) in San Diego, California

Subtitled *Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*, the movie *Borat* is [mockumentary](#) comedy. Most of those appearing in the film are not paid performers, but real people whom Borat met on his journey.^[3] The movie was distributed by [20th Century Fox](#), and directed by [Larry Charles](#). It premiered at the 2006 [Toronto International Film Festival](#), and was released across Europe and North America on November 3, 2006.

The film follows Borat in his travels across the United States as he commits cultural [solecisms](#) and exposes a few American ones. Over the course of the film, Borat falls in love with Pamela Anderson after watching a rerun of [Baywatch](#) and [vows](#) to make her his wife.

The film opened at # 1 in the United States, taking in \$26.4 million on a limited release of 837 screens during its first weekend, beating [Fahrenheit 9/11](#) as the biggest opening weekend for a film released in fewer than 1,000 cinemas. Cohen celebrated the release of the movie with a host of promotional '[in-character](#)' interviews.^[4]

On November 9, 2006, the Russian [Federal Agency](#) for Culture and Cinematography issued an opinion, citing "it could offend viewers in relation to certain ethnic groups and religions."

The movie expanded its release on the second weekend to 2,566 screens, where it took in an additional \$29 million.^[5]

In 2007, Baron Cohen won a [Golden Globe](#) for "Best Performance by an Actor in a Motion Picture - Musical Or Comedy."

With a production budget of \$18,000,000, the movie earned \$128,501,044 in the United States and another \$128,848,505 in the rest of the world. \$257,349,549 in total as of March 2007.^[6]

Book

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In 2007, a book from Cohen was released entitled, "Touristic Guidings to Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan/ Touristic Guidings to Minor Nation of U.S. and A.", with humor about both countries in the same style as movie.

Language

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Though he pretends to speak Kazakh, Borat really speaks in [Hebrew](#) mixed with some [Polish](#) and other [Slavic language](#) phrases, such as "*jagshemash (jak się masz)*" and "*chenquieh (dziękuję)*" (Polish "how are you" and "thank you"). As such, the film became popular in Israel.

Borat also lapses into Hebrew while purporting to sing the Kazakhstani [national anthem](#) at a [Savannah Sand Gnats](#) game. He kept repeating a famous [Hebrew folk song](#): קוֹמ בְּחֹר עֲצֵל וְצֵא לַעֲבוּדָה (קוֹמ בְּחֹר עֲצֵל וְצֵא לַעֲבוּדָה; kum bachur atzel ve'tze la'avoda; "get up lazy guy and go to work [...]") [...] קוֹקוֹרִיקוּ הַתְּרַנֵּגוֹל קָרָא; kookooriku kookooriku ha'tarnegol kara; "cock-a-doodle-do the cock has crowed"), and also called Kazakhstan a distant/desolate place (literally "hole" (חור)(*hor*)).

His producer [Azamat Bagatov](#) (Ken Davitian) speaks [Armenian](#), while his daughter Tutar (Maria Bakalova) speaks [Bulgarian](#)

In the opening scenes in the town of Kuzcek, the villagers speak [Romanian](#) because these scenes were shot in [Glod, Romania](#). As in the rest of the movie, what is spoken does not match the translation given in the subtitles. For example, when Borat's wife Oksana speaks, the subtitles show her telling Borat to "do something useful and dig his mother's grave," when she is actually telling him to go into "the devil's cunt."

Criticism and controversy

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See also [Da Ali G Show: Controversy](#)

Criticized as unfair smear against Kazakhstan

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Some say that Kazakhstan is not as bad as Borat says it is and that it is wrong of him to say such things.^[7]

In August 2004, the [Chief Rabbi](#) of Kazakhstan, at an international religious meeting in [Brussels](#), stated that in 10 years in the country, he had never faced [anti-Semitism](#). He praised the Government of Kazakhstan for its treatment of the Jewish community.

On [October 19](#), the [Associated Press](#) reported that Kazakhstan's Deputy Foreign Minister, Rakhat Aliyev, had invited Cohen to visit Kazakhstan to see how wrong he was about it. In an interview, Aliyev asserted that:

His trip could yield a lot of discoveries—that women not only travel inside buses but also drive their own cars, that we make [wine](#) from grapes, that Jews can freely attend [synagogues](#) and so on.

Denigration of Gypsies

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Borat's film has frequently been accused of promoting [antiziganism](#). The scenes supposedly filmed in Borat's Kazakhstani village were actually filmed in an impoverished [Roma](#) (gipsy) village of [Glod](#) in [Romania](#). [USA Today](#) reports that [poverty](#) villagers were offered between \$3.30 and \$5.50 to bring animals into their houses and perform other acts some critics called humiliating.^[8] The studio contends that participants were paid double the rate recommended by the Romanian movie office for extras.^[9]

Two villagers of Glod have hired [reparation](#) attorney [Ed Fagan](#) to sue the makers of the film for \$30 million for [human rights](#) abuses. Fagan intends to

submit lawsuits in [New York](#) and [Florida](#) state courts, as well as in [Frankfurt, Germany](#).^[9] Fagan said that he hoped to "teach [Hollywood](#) a very expensive lesson." The lawsuit was thrown out by U.S. District Judge Loretta Preska in a hearing in early December 2006 on the ground that the charges were too vague to stand up in court. Fagan plans to refile.^[10]

Denigration of Jews

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The Borat character has elicited some controversy, mostly related to his frequent displays of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism.

Baron Cohen, who is himself Jewish, has explained his character's [racism](#) by stating that the segments show how people are sometimes racist because others around them are too and that it is important to stand up against racism.^[11] "Borat essentially works a tool. By himself pretending to be anti-Semitic, he lets people lower their guard and expose their own prejudice," Cohen explains to [Rolling Stone](#).^[12] Cohen, the grandson of a [Holocaust](#) survivor, says he wishes in particular to expose the role of indifference:

When I was in university, there was this major historian of the [Third Reich](#), [Ian Kershaw](#), who said, 'The path to [Auschwitz](#) was paved with indifference.' I know it's not very funny being a comedian talking about the Holocaust, but it's an interesting idea that not everyone in [Germany](#) had to be a raving anti-Semite. They just had to be apathetic.^[12]

Regarding the enthusiastic response to his song "In My Country There is Problem" (detailed below), he says, "Did it reveal that they were anti-Semitic? Perhaps. But maybe it just revealed that they were indifferent to anti-Semitism."

However, the [Anti-Defamation League](#), a U.S.-based group that "...combat[s] anti-Semitism and bigotry of all kinds", complained to [HBO](#) after Borat performed a [country western](#) song titled "[In My Country There Is Problem](#)" that called on people to '[throw the Jew down the well](#)', warning them that 'you must be careful of his teeth' and that 'you must grab him by his horns', to applause and joining in from some of the audience in [Tucson, Arizona](#). The chorus goes: "Throw the Jew down the well/So my country can be free/You must grab him by his horns/Then we have a big party."^{[13][14]}

In another scene, Borat visits the Serengeti Range ranch in [Texas](#), where the owner of the ranch confides that he believes the Holocaust was a necessity for [Germany](#). He further implies that he would have no problem running a ranch where people can hunt, in Borat's words, "deer... then Jew."

An interview with [James Broadwater](#), an [evangelical Christian](#) and [Republican](#) candidate for [U.S. Congress](#) from [Mississippi](#), caused Broadwater to receive some hateful [emails](#) after an episode of *Da Ali G Show* aired in which Broadwater stated that Jews will go to [Hell](#). He was told that

the interview would be played in foreign countries to teach others about the American [political system](#). Broadwater later posted a letter on his website against *Da Ali G Show*, explaining that his statement referred to a theological belief that anyone that "accepts [Jesus Christ](#) as Lord and Saviour will spend eternity in [Heaven](#), while everyone who rejects Him will spend eternity in [Hell](#)." Broadwater did not apologise for his comments. Instead, he insisted that "the [liberal](#), anti-God media needs to be brought under the strict control of the [FCC](#), and that as soon as possible."^[15]

In the movie, Borat continues to hate Jews and be fearful of them. He does not like to fly while in America in case the Jews "make another [9/11](#)". Later, as he finds himself in a hotel run by an old Jewish couple, he tries to "escape" and throws money at two bugs on the floor, afraid that the Jews have [shapeshifted](#) into cockroaches.

Cohen later joked, upon receiving a British comedy award, that Borat was guest of honour at the [International Conference to Review the Global Vision of the Holocaust](#) in [Tehran](#).

Iraq war sarcasm

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In January 2005, after pretending to be making a [documentary](#), Cohen angered a crowd at a [rodeo](#) in [Salem, Virginia](#). The crowd first cheered his statements of "support" for the [Iraq war](#), including statements like "We is support your [war of terror](#)", and "May [George Bush](#) drink the blood of every single man, woman, and child of [Iraq](#)". However, the applause softened when he exclaimed "May you destroy their country so that for the next thousand years, not even a single lizard will survive in their desert!" The crowd then got infuriated when he sang the (fictional) Kazakhstan national anthem to an off-key version of the [US national anthem](#).^[16]

"If he had been out there a minute longer, I think somebody would have shot him," said one witness. "People were booing him, [flipping him off](#)." For his own safety, Cohen was escorted from the venue. (Much of the event appears in the movie.^[17] A credulous news report about the incident, aired on a local television station, is included in the DVD extras).

Controversy with Kazakhstan's government

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Baron Cohen has also been accused of creating a derogatory image of Kazakhstan.^[18]

In November 2005, following Borat's hosting of the [MTV Europe Music Awards](#) in [Lisbon](#), Kazakhstan's [Foreign Ministry](#) said he was worried about the character. Spokesman Yerzhan Ashykbayev told a news conference: "We view Mr Cohen's behaviour at the MTV Europe Music Awards as utterly unacceptable, being a concoction of bad taste and ill manners which is

completely incompatible with the ethics and civilised behaviour of Kazakhstan's people", concluding "We reserve the right to any [legal action](#) to prevent new pranks of the kind."^[19]

Baron Cohen has since posted a video on the "Official Borat Homesite" where Borat responds to Ashykbayev in character. In the video, Borat states, in part:

In response to Mr. Ashykbayev's comments, I'd like to state I have no connection with Mr. Cohen and fully support my government's decision to sue this Jew. Since the 2003 Tuleyakiv reforms, Kazakhstan is as civilized as any other country in the world. Women can now travel on *inside* of bus, [homosexuals](#) no longer have to wear blue hats, and [age of consent](#) has been raised to eight years old. Please, [captain of industry](#); I invite you to come to Kazakhstan where we have incredible [natural resources](#), hardworking labour, and some of the cleanest prostitutes in whole of [Central Asia](#). Goodbye! Dzienkuje!^[20]

[Reuters](#) quoted an unnamed Western diplomat as saying, "They (the [Government of Kazakhstan](#)) are damned if they do [respond] and damned if they don't," he said. "It's sort of unfortunate that he hit upon Kazakhstan." Another unnamed source inside Kazakhstan's Washington embassy called Borat a "one-man diplomatic [wrecking ball](#)."^{[21][22]}

The next week, the government hired two Western [public relations](#) firms to counter Borat's claims, and ran a four-page advertisement in [The New York Times](#). The ad carried testimonials about the nation's democracy, [education system](#) and the power and influence enjoyed by women. On a previous occasion, Borat responded to such official complaints by issuing his own "press release", a bunch of random [Cyrillic](#) characters. He would again respond when promoting his movie in front of the Kazakhstani Embassy in Washington, roundly denouncing the advertisements as "[Uzbek](#) propaganda".^[23]

On December 13, 2005, the right to use the [domain name](#) www.borat.kz was suspended, and the site attached to it was closed down.^[24] The domain-issuing body said that they took this action since false names were given for the site's administrators, and also because the site www.borat.kz was hosted outside Kazakhstan. However, the stated underlying cause of the action was in order to censor the content of the site: "We've done this so he can't badmouth Kazakhstan under the .kz [domain name](#)," Nurlan Isin, President of the Association of Kazakh IT Companies, told Reuters. "He can go and do whatever he wants at other domains."^[25]

[Reporters Without Borders](#) petitioned the [ICANN ombudsman](#) to allow Borat to keep the website.^[26] Meanwhile, the "Official Borat Homesite" was moved to the [.tv](#) domain, where it remains. As of October 14, 2007, the former domain name was still suspended. The 2006 annual human rights

report released by the [US State Department](#) cited the loss of the .kz website as evidence of the Kazakhstani government's efforts to stop free speech.^[27]

Borat has, however, recently been defended by [Dariga Nazarbayeva](#), a politician and daughter of Kazakhstan's President [Nursultan Nazarbayev](#). She stated on a national [news programme](#) *Karavan* that Cohen's website "damaged our image much less than its closure, which was covered by all global [news agencies](#)," and "We should not be afraid of humour and we shouldn't try to control everything, I think."^[28]

White House "visit"

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On September 28, 2006, Cohen appeared in character as Borat at the [White House](#) gates to give a [press conference](#) and invite "Supreme Warlord Premier [George Walker Bush](#)" to a screening of his forthcoming movie, along with "[O.J. Simpson](#)", "[Melvin Gibsons](#)" and other "American dignitaries", after which they would join him for drinks at [Hooters](#). [Secret Service](#) Uniformed Division Officers would not admit him on to the grounds.

Complaint by Gypsies in Germany

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On October 18, 2006, [European Centre for Antiziganism Research](#), which pleads against discrimination of Gypsies, filed a complaint^[29] with prosecutors based on Borat's comments about [Gypsies](#) in his movie. The complaint accuses him of spreading lies and inciting violence against the [ethnic group](#).^[30]

Avian Flu "Gift"

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At a [press conference](#) just hours before the live broadcast of the [2005 MTV Europe Music Awards](#), he shocked local and international journalists in [Lisbon, Portugal](#), by bringing a bag of birds from [Romania](#) (the first European country to detect [avian influenza](#)) as a gift, then proceeded to apologize for them all dying.

Victims of Borat hoaxes

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[WAPT](#) ([Jackson, Mississippi](#)) [TV news](#) producer [Dharma Arthur](#) states in [Newsweek](#) she lost her job as a result of her booking Borat on a local afternoon news program. At the time of the appearance, she was unaware of Cohen's act. During an interview with [anchor](#) Brad McMullan, Borat made sexual and [scatological](#) references, kissed McMullan, and later disrupted a

live [weather report](#).^[31] She said: "Because of him, my boss lost faith in my abilities and second-guessed everything I did... I spiralled into depression, and... was released from my contract... It took me three months to find another job, and now I'm thousands of dollars in debt and struggling to keep my house out of foreclosure... How upsetting that a man who leaves so much harm in his path is lauded as a comedic genius."

The broadcast, including the initial interview, the disrupted weather report, and several behind-the-scenes shots made by Borat's own [movie crew](#), is seen in the *Borat* movie.

Not all hoax victims threaten to sue, however. Behind-the-scenes interviews with Randall Shelley ("Guide to Baseball"), Danny Passmore ("Guide to Hobbies USA"), [Jennifer DeFrancisco](#) / Charles Di Cagno ("Guide to Acting"), Ken Goldberg ("Guide to Being a Real Man"), and Peta Heskell ("Guide to English Gentlemen") have all resulted in the subjects deciding not to sue.^[32]

Borat gets sued

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- The state prosecutor in [Hamburg, Germany](#), filed a complaint against Mr. Cohen, accusing him of slander, inciting violence against the Gypsy's groups, and violating Germany's [anti-discrimination law](#).^[33]
- Two [fraternity](#) boys featured in the movie have filed an anonymous [complaint](#) against corporations and persons affiliated with Baron Cohen in the [Superior Court](#) of [Los Angeles County, California](#), for [fraud](#), [rescission of contract](#), [common law](#) false light, [statutory](#) false light, appropriation of likeness, and [negligent infliction of emotional distress](#).^[34] One of the plaintiffs has been revealed as Justin Seay, a graduate of the [University of South Carolina](#) and former Vice President of the [Chi Psi](#) Fraternity.^[35] On December 11, 2006, an L.A. Judge denied the pair a [restraining order](#) to remove them from the movie.^[36]
- Cindy Streit, the owner of Etiquette Training Service in [Birmingham, Alabama](#), has claimed mistreatment and fraud after Borat came to a dinner party and embarrassed the other guests. Ms. Streit has hired attorney [Gloria Allred](#), who is demanding an investigation by the California [attorney general](#). Allred says her client agreed to be filmed as part of a documentary for [Belarus](#) television, and for those purposes only. She is asking the attorney general to consider all appropriate relief, including a percentage of the profits from the movie. [20th Century Fox](#) denied the claims and stated that there was nothing in writing about only being shown in [Belarus](#); the studio also asserted that the release form clearly stated the footage could be distributed worldwide.^[37]
- According to a January 2007 report by the Associated Press, [Dovale Glickman](#) had planned to sue Baron Cohen for copyright infringement of the phrase "Wa wa wee Wa." Glickman originated the phrase 16 years ago as part of his Israeli comedy series *Zehu Zeh*.^[38]

In popular culture

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- In *Epic Movie*, [Danny Jacobs](#) portrays Borat at the end of the film and repeats the "NOT!" joke used in *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*.
- The *30-Second Bunnies Theatre* has produced a parody of Borat, although in this case, he is from Bunzakhstan (a parody of [Kazakhstan](#)).

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