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"Hounded Out of Time: Black Shuck's Lesson in the Anthropocene"

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Drawing in nightmares, shadows, and loneliness, this article follows a rarely trodden and difficult path across the shifting geology of Norfolk, a track marked by fleeting glimpses and horrible signs of the deadly consequences of deep time and human choice. A subject of fascination for folklorists, cryptozoologists, and the general public alike, in East Anglia stories abound of a huge, devilish hound, with saucer-shaped eyes and followed by the demonic stench of Sulphur: Black Shuck. This ethnographic description, of pursuit by—rather than of—footprints in the mud, whispered stories from isolated places, and the mysteriously mutilated corpses of deer considers the significance of encounters with this phantasm for recent debates surrounding the proper understanding of the beginning of the Anthropocene and the implications of this for our sense time and responsibility. In this era of unprecedented human power over the natural world, the Shuck—the mere sight of whom brings death—still haunts us; his chthonic presence reminding us of the inexorable yet unpredictable power of death. By attending the monstrous, spectral ambiguity of the Shuck and his ability to reformulate the landscape of East Anglia as a social space, this article explores how the coeval quality of the longue durée of deep time, and the haunting rupture entailed by the prospect of our own mortality, can enchant, rather than blunt, our sense of human responsibility in the Anthropocene. (Text from author's abstract)

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