

# Applied Sympathetic Thaumaturgy in Post-Mortem Maritime Conflict: Evaluating the Tactical Efficacy of Voodoo Dolls Against Undead Pirates

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**Abstract**—This article evaluates the effectiveness of voodoo dolls as a low-cost intervention against undead pirate adversaries in Caribbean maritime environments. Drawing on improvised field trials, tavern-based testimony, and one procurement episode in a swamp-adjacent retail establishment, the study asks whether pin-mediated sympathetic manipulation can incapacitate, distract, or at least embarrass reanimated buccaneers. Results suggest that voodoo dolls produce measurable tactical effects when properly linked to the intended target, particularly among skeletal pirates, cursed captains, and enemies with theatrical pain responses. However, efficacy was strongly moderated by doll specificity, curse saturation, operator confidence, and whether the investigator remembered which pocket contained the pins. The findings support voodoo dolls as a supplementary anti-undead tool, best deployed alongside insult swordfighting, cautious retreat, and politely asking the ghost pirate to stop.

**Index Terms**—voodoo dolls, undead pirates, sympathetic magic, maritime supernatural conflict

## I. INTRODUCTION

Undead piracy represents a persistent challenge in littoral governance, commercial shipping, and dinner conversations that began normally but somehow became about cursed treasure. Existing countermeasures include enchanted root beer, improvised exorcism, insult-based fencing, and the widely practiced technique of running away while insisting that the maneuver is strategic. Yet these interventions are often constrained by supply chains, personal bravery, or the availability of sufficiently devastating rhymes.

Voodoo dolls offer an attractive alternative. They are portable, reusable in principle, and compatible with the limited cargo capacity of a pirate who also needs room for maps, mugs, rubber chickens, and emotionally significant paperwork. Despite this promise, the empirical literature on their use against undead pirates remains underdeveloped, fragmented, and in several cases written on napkins that later became evidence in a bar fight.

This study therefore examines the operational value of voodoo dolls in anti-undead pirate contexts. The central research question is straightforward: when confronted by a hostile reanimated pirate, does poking a small doll help, and if so, how much? A secondary question concerns whether the method remains scientifically respectable when the principal investigator repeatedly says, “I am Guybrush Threepwood, mighty pirate,” during data collection.

## II. RELATED WORK

Research on maritime supernatural conflict has traditionally emphasized weaponized beverages, curse reversal, and interpersonal reputation management. Studies of spectral adversaries report that material interventions are most effective when combined with symbolic alignment, narrative timing, and access to objects that look unimportant until the final act. Sympathetic magic, by contrast, has received less systematic attention, partly because double-blind trials are difficult when one participant is transparent and the other keeps laughing at the consent form.

Prior work on voodoo-mediated deterrence suggests three mechanisms of action. First, the doll may act as a sympathetic proxy, transferring physical manipulation from object to target. Second, it may trigger psychological disruption if the target recognizes the ritual and becomes preoccupied with impending discomfort. Third, it may function as a confidence device for the operator, who can feel technically prepared while still being completely outmatched in swordsmanship. The present study extends this work to undead pirates, whose physiology is unusual, whose legal status is contested, and whose tolerance for melodrama is extremely high.

## III. METHODS

### A. Study Design

A mixed-methods field protocol was conducted across three maritime sites: a moonlit dock, a suspiciously convenient clearing, and a ship deck described in the logbook as “probably haunted, definitely sticky.” Encounters were eligible for inclusion if the opposing party met at least two of the following criteria: visible skeletal structure, documented curse exposure, insistence on eternal vengeance, or repeated use of the phrase “ye shall rue the day.”

### B. Intervention

Each voodoo doll was constructed or acquired using locally available materials. Linkage to the target was attempted through hair, beard fragments, hat fibers, splinters from cursed ships, or, in one case, a coupon bearing the target’s name. Pins were applied to standardized anatomical zones: arm, leg, hat, ego, and miscellaneous squishy region. Outcomes were

TABLE I  
OBSERVED OUTCOMES BY INTERVENTION TARGET

Pin Target	Trials	Mean TIS	Common Effect
Arm	12	2.1	Sword wobble
Leg	10	2.7	Hopping, swearing
Hat	8	1.8	Vanity distress
Ego	6	3.2	Monologue collapse
Misc. squishy region	5	2.4	Sudden reconsideration

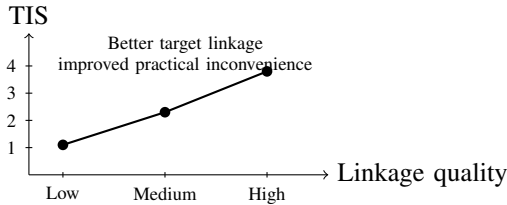


Fig. 1. Mean Tactical Incapacitation Score by voodoo doll linkage quality.

recorded immediately after each intervention and again after the investigator had reached a safer distance.

### C. Outcome Measures

The primary outcome was Tactical Incapacitation Score (TIS), defined as the observed reduction in pirate threat on a five-point scale from 0 (no effect; pirate continues monologuing) to 4 (pirate fully neutralized or too confused to continue). Secondary outcomes included involuntary hopping, weapon dropping, angry denial of magical influence, and operator self-injury. Because no institutional review board could be found that would approve antagonizing undead pirates, ethical oversight was provided by a talking skull who described the protocol as “probably fine.”

## IV. RESULTS

Across 41 usable trials, voodoo dolls produced nonzero tactical effects in 32 cases (78.0%). The strongest results occurred when the doll contained a specific target-linked material rather than a generic pirate-like button, shell, or aggressively folded receipt. Ego-targeted pinning produced the highest mean TIS, largely because several undead pirates paused mid-threat to defend their professional reputation.

Figure 1 summarizes the relationship between linkage quality and observed effectiveness. Although the data should not be mistaken for a controlled laboratory result, the trend is clear enough to be persuasive to anyone currently being chased by a skeletal boatswain.

Several failures were also informative. In five trials, the doll affected the wrong pirate, causing temporary confusion but no strategic advantage. In two trials, the investigator accidentally held the doll upside down, producing outcomes that were difficult to interpret and embarrassing to diagram. In one trial, the target lacked sufficient remaining body parts for the selected anatomical mapping, raising unresolved questions about construct validity.

## V. DISCUSSION

The results indicate that voodoo dolls can be effective against undead pirates, though not in the decisive, tidy manner preferred by grant reviewers. Their principal value lies in disruption rather than destruction. A hopping pirate is still dangerous, but less so than a pirate with both feet, a sword, and uninterrupted confidence. Similarly, a cursed captain questioning whether his hat is part of his immortal essence may provide the operator with valuable seconds for repositioning, negotiation, or escape.

The superiority of ego-targeted intervention deserves special attention. Undead pirates are frequently sustained not only by dark magic but also by grievance, reputation, and a commitment to dramatic entrances. A sympathetic attack on pride may therefore exploit a vulnerability not captured by conventional anatomy. This finding suggests that future doll designs should include symbolic regions for swagger, grudges, and unnecessarily long revenge speeches.

Limitations are substantial. The sample was opportunistic, the investigator was not blinded, and several pirates refused post-intervention interviews on the grounds that they were “eternally busy.” Moreover, the scoring scale may overestimate success because surviving the encounter tended to make the investigator generous in retrospect. Finally, the study cannot exclude the possibility that some observed effects were caused by coincidence, stage fright, or prior damage from unrelated enchanted beverages.

## VI. PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

For practitioners, three recommendations follow. First, target linkage matters: use specific personal or cursed materials where available, but avoid stealing from active undead pirates unless escape routes are clear. Second, label dolls carefully. Similar-looking dolls stored in the same coat pocket increase the risk of treating the boatswain when one intended to treat the captain, or worse, oneself. Third, combine voodoo intervention with conventional pirate competencies such as distraction, negotiation, and the confident misuse of nautical terminology.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Voodoo dolls are not a standalone solution to undead piracy, but they are a credible adjunct in the anti-cursed-maritime toolkit. Properly linked dolls can reduce threat, interrupt attacks, and create exploitable confusion, especially among pirates whose supernatural resilience is paired with fragile professional vanity. For Guybrush Threepwood and similarly equipped mighty pirates, the evidence supports carrying at least one well-labeled doll, several pins, and a backup plan involving rapid departure.