DEAD BITE belongs to a very small sub-subset of Asian horror in which rock/pop bands play themselves and fight zombies. If you liked WILD ZERO, chances are you’ll enjoy this one too.

Not only does Thai hiphop group Gancore Club star in DEAD BITE (making its international premiere tonight and also playing Wednesday at the New York Asian Film Festival), their lead singer Joey Boy directed and co-scripted too. We first meet him on screen via a framing device in which he’s trapped in a dark, confined, slimy place, explaining his plight to a wrong-number caller on his cell phone. Flash back to assorted band shenanigans (presented, like a good deal of what follows, as camcorder footage), before the Gancore boys are offered another gig on an island off the Thai coast. They’re at first reluctant, but are quickly convinced to make the trip by the promise of…“bikinis!!!” And so it comes to pass, as a bevy of hot girls—the most prominent of whom is named “Bowling”—joins Gancore and their entourage, modeling an assortment of skimpy swimsuits. Exploitation fans shouldn’t get their hopes up for more skin than that, though; DEAD BITE’s sex content is largely tease.

The horror element is more aggressive, and it begins not long after Gancore Club and co. have come ashore on Mermaid Island, where numerous boats are rumored to have disappeared. They find out why when they’re attacked on the beach from both sides: hatchet- and

hammer-wielding savages charge at them from the forest, while strange undead creatures arise from the water to take bites out of them. To this point, DEAD BITE has been a loose-limbed, at least partially improvised-seeming romp, but this lengthy scene is quite well-staged by its neophyte director, who ups its dramatic impact by having a sudden storm blow in (a gambit he uses during the climactic action as well). By an extraordinary coincidence, only the key members of Gancore Club survive to flee to a mountaintop, and try to figure out how to survive and make it to safety.

Zombie fans may also be a little disappointed by what follows, since the ghouls figure less into the plot than do the vicious natives, who worship a mermaid goddess. DEAD BITE turns out to be a more disciplined movie than one might expect; rather than anything-goes craziness throughout, it attempts to develop an actual plot, complete with backstory explained by flashbacks and the arrival of a couple of additional characters. There are plenty of goofy moments and one-liners (some of them pretty funny) throughout, including several self-referential quips such as “That’s like B-grade horror movies,” but also a number of scenes that are played straight-faced, as when the survivors take turns taping farewell messages to their loved ones.

A tone of solemnity is never allowed to hold for long, of course, before someone’s tripping on magic mushrooms or being threatened with death. And getting back to the zombie thing: The undead have become such a familiar, consistent presence in international genre cinema that DEAD BITE deserves some credit from sidelining them a bit and trying something a little different. It’s not a transcendently outrageous experience like WILD ZERO (or RAW FORCE, with which it shares some basic similarities), but DEAD BITE is worth a look for the midnight-movie-inclined; having viewed it on a screener, I can say that you can easily add half a skull to the rating below if you see it with an enthusiastic theatrical crowd. And it merges the pop-music and horror genres successfully enough to make one wonder why nobody’s tried such a thing in America. When are we going to get to watch, say, One Direction get attacked by the living dead?