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Is life imitating art for star of 'Sopranos'?

Baby Bing has been pinched.

The 16-year-old actor who plays the son of mob boss Tony Soprano on the HBO hit series "The Sopranos," may be taking some lessons from his television pop.

Robert Iler, who plays A.J., the troubled heir apparent to the fictitious New Jersey crime family, was charged with robbing two teens of about \$ 40 just after midnight Wednesday on Manhattan's tony Upper East Side.

Police said Iler and three other youths tried to rob the teenagers, including a Brazilian tourist. Iler, who lives in Manhattan, was also charged with possession of marijuana and drug paraphernalia.

"Robert denies the allegations, and we are cooperating," said his attorney, Steven Mintz. "I have known Robert for a couple of years. He's a wonderful kid."

The real-life arrest follows the scripted path of Iler's television persona, Anthony Soprano Jr., known to the FBI as Baby Bing. During the hit show's third season, Iler's character has become a pot smoker who begins questioning his family's suburban life, figuring out that his father runs the mob. He has vandalized his high school's pool, and then was expelled for cheating on a test.

In the show's last episodes he was nearly sent off to military school, but he was saved by fainting spells, a curse inherited from his father, whose own FBI code name is Papa Bing.

The actor Iler got his start by appearing in a Pizza Hut commercial when he was six years old. Iler appeared in his first film -- "The Tic Code" -- when he was 10, and then in several commercials. He landed the role of A.J. Soprano in 1999. His salary hasn't been disclosed; lead actor James Gandolfini earns a reported \$ 5 million a season.

Iler's mother Helen told People Magazine in 1999 that her son's paycheck goes into a trust fund, except for "\$ 100 a month he gets to spend on extras such as football cards".

In an online chat in April, Iler said his character has slowly been filtering into his own life. He said he was enjoying the show, and usually the attention it brings.

"From when we filed the first season to when the first season aired I had changed a lot --

the way I looked -- so many people didn't recognize me. Lately, it just doesn't stop," Iler said.

He said he can't wait for his character to get into the Soprano family business.

"I think he will think that it is pretty cool," Iler said.

Iler and his friends were arrested after the 16-year-old victims flagged down a police cruiser, then officers drove them around until they spotted the boys in John Jay Park, police said. His mother, grandfather, and other relatives were at the courthouse to lend support.

Iler, who attends public high school in New York City, was handcuffed. Unlike his character, who is carted around in his mother Carmela's Mercedes Benz, Iler was taken to central booking in a police van.