

Crime pays for rookie helmers

THANKS TO GUY RITCHIE (remember him?) and his legion of cut-price imitators, the British gangster movie has become a largely discredited genre of late.

Yet as this year's BAFTA nominations prove, it can still throw up exciting, though controversial, new talent. Two directors of micro-budget crime pics are among the contenders for the British

newcomer prize — **Julian Gilbey** with his South London gangsta thriller "Rollin' With the Nines," and **Paul Andrew Williams** for "London to Brighton," about a prostitute and a 12-year-old girl on the run from vengeful hoods.

Both pics were financed way outside the industry mainstream (although "London to Brighton" ended up getting completion coin from the U.K. Film Council). And while the flair of the

filmmakers is unmistakable, both pics are so grimy, violent and morally ambiguous that they have left audiences deeply divided.

In Internet chat rooms, "Rollin' With the Nines" sparks virtual fist-fights between its admirers and those who describe it as "the worst film I've ever seen," or dismiss it as "rollin' with the middle-class white boys." Although it deals with gun-totin' hip-hop crews and corrupt cops, Gilbey and his co-writer/brother Tom hail from plummy Henley-on-Thames. Their great-grandfather was the aristocratic Scottish actor Nigel Bruce, who played Dr. Watson to Basil Rathbone's Sherlock Holmes.

The 31-year-old Gilbey, a self-confident fellow with an aquiline profile and long flowing locks, was inspired by the guerrilla spirit of **Roberto Rodriguez** to quit film school early and fund his own early efforts by moonlighting as a waiter.

His latest project, "Rise of the Foot-

soldier," has just started shooting for Carnaby Films. The \$2.5 million pic (more than double his budget for "Rollin'") is based on the true story of **Carlton Leach**, a soccer hooligan in the 1970s who moved on to become a nightclub bouncer, bodyguard and mobster. He finally cleaned up his act after his best friends were murdered in the notorious Essex "Range Rover" slayings of the mid-'90s.

Gilbey is bemused by the criticism aimed at his debut movie for its supposed lack of moral viewpoint, and its infatuation with guns, gore and gangsters. He's quick to preempt similar charges against "Foodsoldier."

"It's a very different take on the genre," he claims. "It doesn't resemble a gangster movie. It's a very emotional film, a very moral film, a tragic film about relationships, set over an epic 30-year timespan. If any film is going to say crime doesn't pay, this is it."

His next project, titled "The Filmmaker," is already lined up to shoot this summer, with backing from L.A.-based Gold Circle Films. Budgeted at \$10 million, it's about a Western film crew shooting in Albania who rip off the local mafia and foolishly try to escape with-

out paying their dues.

Gilbey was working almost entirely below the industry radar before his surprise BAFTA nod. Williams, on the other hand, made one of the year's most lauded debuts with "London to Brighton." Some upscale critics hailed it as the best British film of the year, but its use of pedophilia as the premise for a gut-churning chase thriller left others with a sour taste.

Williams is deliberately trying to strike out in a new and lighter direction with his second film, "The Cottage," a black comedy about a pair of bumbling kidnappers, which is set for production this spring with backing from Pathe.

He confesses to feeling the pressure to live up to the hype for his debut, and hopes "The Cottage" will surprise people. "I want to do something so different, so not what people expect, that it's non-comparable to 'London to Brighton.'"

That, he says, is why he decided not to direct his own more conventional horror script "The Day," which **Tom Shankland** ("Waz") will helm instead for Vertigo Films, distributor of "London to Brighton." "I don't want to be known as the genre king," he explains.

