Review: Apple TV+ drama 'City on Fire' sags in parts but is gripping overall

CHENNAI: Apple TV+'s latest drama, "City on Fire," ticks all the right boxes of a gripping thriller. "Gossip Girl" creators Josh Schwartz and Stephanie Savage have dextrously carved eight episodes from Garth Risk Hallberg's laboriously long novel of the same name.

The production is slick and superbly mounted, and the only big change the creators have gone in for is the timeline.

While the novel is set around the Christmas of 1976 (just before the great blackout in July 1977 and the looting that followed), the television series has been pushed to roughly 18 months after 9/11, and we can feel the eerie jitteriness of the terror attack in New York.

chwartz and Savage pepper the segments with an attempted murder in New York's Central Park, detectives furiously figuring out the leads and characters from different sections of the city's society.

The victim is young Samantha Yeung (brilliantly conveying her performance arc from a dream girl in the early scenes to something far more complex).

Her home front has been shattered after her mother left and father sank into alcoholism. She is a photographer and spends a lot of her time with underground rock bands and, yes, her camera.

When she is not into these, she holds hands with her former fellow high school student, Charlie (Wyatt Oleff), and gets involved with a married man, Keith (Ashley Zukerman), whose wife, Regan (Jemima Kirke), begins to get mysterious notes about the infidelity.

Her brother William (Nico Tortorella rises to the challenge of a miserable part) is the black sheep of the family and an addict.

"City of Fire," while being a compelling watch, could have been more prudent about its selections from the book.

There is too much of Samantha-Charlie's mooning, some of this playtime could have been diverted to the actual Central Park crime. The script is variable and sags in parts. And, yes, the series gets most exciting at the end, which seems to defeat the mission of attempting to reel in viewers.