Netflix's 'Seven Seconds' is chilling but predictable

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Seven Seconds is enough time to change lives, or end them.

That's the story behind the title of Netflix's latest crime drama (streaming now). The first few minutes of a planned anthology from The Killing creator, Veena Sud.

Like AMC's The Killing, Seconds is focused on one crime and its ripple effects, and its protagonist is a driven female detective, this time an assistant chief, K.J. Harpur (Clare-Hope Ashitey). But seven Seconds has neither the additive quality of the story's father drama. And while it takes to make big statements about police and race relations in America, it gets lost in a sea of unlikely characters and predictable plot lines.

Seconds covers the aftermath of a child- and-run accident (which lasts about seven seconds) in which an off-duty white cop in Jersey City, Peter Jabolonski (Beau Knipke), strikes a black, biker- riding teenager in a park. Instead of reporting the accident, Jabolonski cooks four shots of an antidepressant, which he helps cover up the crime and leave the teen bleeding to death. Sam (an uncredited Regine King), and father, Isaiah (Russell Hornsby). The defective on the case, Joe ‘Fish’ Billings (Michael Moseley), is eager to write it off; insisting the victim is just “a gang bang.” But K.J. suspects there's something more.

The series is populated with stock characters. The cops who help Jabolonski are mostly corrupt white blue-collar Americans with thick Jersey accents. Lovers and Isaiah are lower-middle-class churchgoers with roots in the projects. The cops are witless and make derogatory comments about K.J., even when she's in the room.

Seconds spends so much time trying to create moral gray areas for its characters that it ends up painting them all with the same brush. Jabolonski is rendered for what he's done, but he's angry and defensive about his wife and relatives. K.J. is the only crusader for justice, but she's a half-functioning alcoholic who drops the ball on other cases.

If Seconds has a true villain, it’s “the system.” The series does make its point: that nothing is fair and the institutions designed to protect us are broken, even if it does so with a heavy hand. It’s hard not to be reminded of ABC’s superior American Crime, which more deftly handled complex social issues and told a better story in the process.

If only there were a little more depth below those seven Seconds.