

MAXWELL'S MADNESS

Black Comedy / Character Drama – TV Series Synopsis

LOGLINE

Over two decades, a once-promising Manchester architect spirals from comfort into poverty, illness anxiety and isolation, leaving his exasperated friends to decide whether to save him, section him — or finally walk away.

ONE-PARAGRAPH OVERVIEW

Maxwell's Madness is a darkly comic, emotionally brutal character drama about Maxwell (aka Max) George, a former architectural draughtsman and recovering heroin addict whose life collapses not through one big tragedy, but through a thousand petty resentments, bad decisions and imagined illnesses. Set primarily in Manchester from 2007–2026, the series charts Max's journey from a man with a flat, a Maserati and a future, to a 56-year-old hypochondriac living in assisted housing, obsessed with his failing body, his perceived injustices, and the belief that everyone else has abandoned him. Anchored by the blackly comic perspectives of his two closest friends, Phil and Ian, **Maxwell's Madness** walks a knife-edge between hilarious and horrifying, asking: *how far can friendship and compassion stretch before they finally snap?*

STONE AND STYLE

The series lives where *Fleabag*, *BoJack Horseman* and *It's a Sin* intersect: brutally honest, laugh-out-loud funny, and then suddenly, shockingly tragic. Almost everything Max says is unintentionally funny in its self-pity, catastrophising and misplaced rage — creating constant tension for those around him who never know whether to laugh, cry or walk out of the room. Visually, the show is grounded and naturalistic — rainy Manchester streets, cramped flats, NHS waiting rooms, NA basements, cheap cafés — with occasional heightened, subjective moments that show how gigantic Maxwell's fears and resentments feel inside his head.

CORE PREMISE

At 37, Max sells his Manchester flat, pockets roughly £250,000, rents a house and buys a Maserati he barely drives over 25 mph, convinced that a luxury car will fix his sense of failure. A disastrous “pump and dump” share scam — involving fellow Narcotics Anonymous members — wipes out much of his capital, while his increasing time in Da Nang, Vietnam drains the rest. A kidney stone leads to a surgery he is warned against, the insertion of a stent that must be replaced every six months, and the birth of a lifelong belief that his body is irreparably broken. As years pass, Max slides into state support, loses his home, becomes an unwilling carer for his elderly father, and eventually ends up in a tiny assisted-living flat where his life shrinks to four walls, old TV repeats, medical paperwork and endless Googling of symptoms.

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What makes **Maxwell's Madness** distinctive is that Max is not a conventional victim. He is funny, charismatic, intelligent — and also negative, self-sabotaging, jealous, volatile and almost pathologically resentful. He catastrophises every letter from the benefits office, every blood test result, every minor pain, and blames everyone else. The central dramatic question becomes: *when someone weaponises their suffering, at what point does compassion become complicity?*

KEY CHARACTERS

- **Maxwell George (37–56)** — Ex-heroin addict, long-time NA member, once a capable draughtsman with a flat in New Islington and a studio in Manchester's Northern Quarter. Brilliantly funny without trying, but riddled with low self-worth, envy, and a growing conviction that he is “the poorest and ugliest person in the whole fellowship.” His defining flaw is not addiction, but *grievance*.
- **Phil Rankin** — Best friend, fellow recovering addict, the “sensible” one who writes letters to the DWP, organises holidays and repeatedly tries to pull Max back from the brink. His patience and good humour are immense — but not infinite.
- **Ian Paulson** — Max's other close friend — mischievous, sharp, often the only one who will say the unsayable to Max's face, yet generous of time and funds. He lives much of the time in Vietnam, giving the show a second visual world and a different emotional temperature.
- **Alisha** — Max's successful sister in Ireland, quietly furious at years of blame, yet still flying in for a last-ditch intervention.
- **Supporting World** — Their late friend Roy, who really does die of cancer; Max's divorced parents, resentments incarnate; NHS psychiatrists, surgeons and benefit officers who see a man whose real illness is not his kidney — but his mind.

SERIES ARC

Series 1: The Wasted Advantages (2007–2013)

We meet Max at his relative high point: recovered from heroin, embedded in NA, owning a flat, running a small practice and about to cash out and “upgrade” his life. The Maserati purchase, the share scam and the Vietnam trips play almost as farce — status anxiety meets delusion — until the kidney surgery marks the first irreversible step into illness anxiety.

Series 2: The Shrinking World (2013–2020)

Max's world gradually contracts. He loses the car, gives up work, lives between hotel rooms in Da Nang and subsidised housing in Manchester. There is enormous humour — bedbugs in assisted living, benefit reassessment paranoia, airport meltdowns over keys that were in his bag all along — but the viewer starts to feel the weight of wasted opportunity and the slow death of Max's social circle.

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Series 3: Illness as Identity (2020–2026)

After his parents both die, Max becomes effectively orphaned, estranged from his sister, and emotionally married to his illnesses. Phil, Ian, Alisha and Damon stage a formal intervention on New Year's Day 2026, forcing a brutal choice: seek psychiatric help and re-engage with NA — or lose their support entirely.

Two potential endings exist: one in which Max, having secretly obtained a gun, kills himself moments after the intervention; and one in which he is effectively sectioned when every other avenue has failed. Both allow the series to end either as a tragic cautionary tale or as a bleak but realistic commentary on the limits of friendship.

WHY THIS SERIES, WHY NOW?

Maxwell's Madness speaks directly to a post-Covid world where health anxiety, loneliness, online self-diagnosis and systemic underfunding of mental health services are everyday realities. It explores the emotional labour demanded of friends and family when one person's suffering dominates the room — and asks questions about masculinity, class, addiction recovery and the welfare state without ever becoming didactic.

Crucially, it is a show built around *performance*: Maxwell is a gift of a role — simultaneously tragic, infuriating, hilarious, and oddly heroic in his refusal to let go of his grievances. Phil, Ian and Alisha offer three different models of love and its limits, giving the series multiple emotional entry points for the audience.

FORMAT

- Episodes:** 6–8 x 1-hour episodes per season
- Seasons:** Designed as a limited 2–3 season arc, with flexibility to expand
- Setting:** Primarily Manchester (Didsbury, Northern Quarter, Harpurhey, Burnage), with key storylines in Da Nang and
- Budget:** Character-driven, location-based drama with contained sets and limited VFX — highly producible at UK or E

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