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## 'Scamanda' Creator Talks Getting Exclusive Access to 'Cancer Scammer' Amanda Riley for New Docuseries (Exclusive)

Charlie Webster talks adapting her hit podcast for TV, and why she wants Riley's story to show there's 'no shame' in being scammed.

MIKE BLOOM • JAN 30, 2025



*Laura Ribatallada*

As a journalist, and a creator, it's very rare to get a second chance at a story. But **Charlie Webster** received such an opportunity in 2023. The broadcaster had hit the biggest point in her career so far with *Scamanda*, a podcast telling the story of **Amanda Riley**, a blogger who made a

fortune off her loved ones by fabricating a cancer diagnosis. *Scamanda* rocketed in popularity, becoming the most downloaded podcast of 2023.

It was only natural, then, that the story would be adapted into a different medium. Indeed, Webster was approached by multiple pitches to turn Riley's story into a TV series, either scripted or unscripted. One of those pitches came to fruition with the four-episode *Scamanda* docuseries, premiering Jan. 30 at 9:00 p.m. ET/PT, creatively led by Webster once more.

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But with this exciting opportunity came some big [questions](#). How much do you grow or change a story you've already told when you move it from an audio medium to a visual one? How much are you pitching to people who have already listened to the podcast, versus those who are brand new to the story?

"I really want those listeners and fans, who are amazing, to feel like they're getting something more," Webster explains in an exclusive interview with *Parade*, "as well as people, new audiences that haven't heard of it, who are so intrigued by the story, and then maybe they want to go to listen to the podcast."

"The podcast is slightly different, because we take a bit more time with it" she continues. "It unravels as you go on. So with the visual piece, with the docuseries, it does bring the story on, but it also does revisit bits from different angles. We reveal who the anonymous tip was. I do have conversations with Amanda. She's not in the docuseries, but I do have conversations. We also go more into our childhood, and there's people that are in the docuseries that weren't in the podcast that give different insights."

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Perhaps one of the biggest additions from the podcast to the docuseries, Webster says, is the presence of Riley's voice—though not literally. She is apparently the only person from the outside world Riley has spoken to while incarcerated, currently serving out a five-year sentence in a federal prison in Fort Worth for wire fraud. And getting to hear from the woman at the center of it all shifted some of Webster's choices in adapting the podcast.

"As I went along, I did get to know Amanda better, and then heard her side or her truth, her side of the story, and whether she was remorseful. That was really important for me," she describes. "And that did inform some of the decisions on the documentary, because there are a few things that Amanda did tell me that she wanted to get across, which we do get across in the documentary."

Read on for our full interview with Charlie Webster. *Scamanda* premieres tonight at 9:00 p.m. ET/PT on ABC.

**You've talked previously about how you received offers to bring *Scamanda* to the screen in both scripted and unscripted form. So talk to me about how and when the idea of a docuseries came together.**

That's a really good question. Because to me, I always look at a story as just a fascinating story. And I think it reflects complex behavior, which I think definitely in my [life](#), is something that I see a lot of, and I think we all do so. But what makes it audio so interesting—because I love both audio and visual, and I work in both—is sometimes you can really go there. You can really describe the nuance; you can make people feel like they're part of the story, and they, in a way, were manipulated. And that's what I was trying to do with the audio podcast of *Scamanda*. And even when I was making *Scamanda* the podcast, I was like, "Oh, this would make a really good drama or visual documentary."

And then, honestly, it was so quick. Within a week, it hit number one. Within two, it was viral everywhere. And I'm so grateful for all the listeners. And then, let's say, in week three, I was getting phone calls, phone calls, phone calls, phone calls about, "Can we make this a TV show?" And lo and behold, it's about to come out. And yeah, I made it a TV show and worked with ABC. I'm a producer on the TV show, and I'm also in the TV show as the storyteller. And obviously, I created the original thing. So it was a really interesting process, because then I worked with the wider team and the rest of the showrunners, and I just kind of like poured my head out to them. Because I got to know everyone so well, and you become so immersed in it. At night, I was dreaming about this story, about Amanda. I was constantly trying to get into Amanda's head to understand why, and also for me to portray the emotional harm that was caused as well. And I think the visual side of things is going to be so interesting. Because I don't know about you, Mike, but you have an image in your head of what it all looks like, and you're about to see all that in real life.

**Did you have any preference one way or the other as to whether Amanda's story was told in a scripted or unscripted show? The former has seen a bit of a boon with series like *Inventing Anna*.**

Well, maybe they don't have to be mutually exclusive! I work in documentaries and unscripted and real life, so I did really see it as a docuseries as well. But I think it would make an interesting drama, and so maybe that's something we will eventually see. But I love a true story. You mentioned *Inventing Anna*, which is well done. And, if this ends up becoming a scripted drama, there's a lot that you can play with it. But I think there's nothing more bizarre than the true story. [Truth] is stranger than fiction. True life is sometimes the strangest thing, where you're like, "If I wrote that as a made-up fiction, nobody would believe me." But it was actually true.

**When it came to adding visuals to the story, what was that creative process like? Because, in a way, this is your opportunity to take a second pass at telling this tale.**

You're in my head, because, honestly, they are the two things that we had to balance. So, because this will also reach new audiences that haven't listened to the podcast. Because not everybody listens to podcasts. Even though it was so great, actually. A lot of people did contact me and say this was the first podcast they'd listened to, which is amazing. So, I hopefully introduced a few people to a new medium. But at the same time, there will be people that watch *Scamanda* the TV docuseries, that have never even heard of the podcast. So then, how do you balance that? So how do you create something that's intriguing, curious, moves the story on what happened next? Are there more characters that you can bring to this that never spoke on the podcast? Which there is.

So there's that side of it. Because, I mean, the podcast was like the number one podcast of 2023, and

I mean this in the most humble way. And so it's listened to by a lot of people. And I really want those listeners and fans, who are amazing, to feel like they're getting something more too, as well as people, new audiences that haven't heard of it, so intrigued by the story, and then maybe they want to go to listen to the podcast. Because the podcast is slightly different, because we take a bit more time with it, and it unravels as you go on. So with the visual piece, with the docuseries, to answer your question, it was a balance of the two things that you just said. And so it does bring the story on, but it also does revisit bits from different angles. We reveal who the anonymous tip was. I do have conversations with Amanda. She's not in the docuseries, but I do have conversations. And you might have seen the trailer where it's a it's like a shot of me saying, "Hi Amanda." And we also go more into our childhood, and there's people that are in the docuseries that weren't in the podcast that give different insights.

**Talk to me about getting those guests onto the show. Do you feel that with the story now brought into the spotlight, it gave them more initiative to come on and lend their own voice to their side of the story?**

Again, I think it was the fact that it was also very successful, and people were talking about it. It was in the zeitgeist. It was viral on social media, and people wanted to know more. I was desperate to do more. I was like, "I want to make another podcast. How can I give more answers to people?" Because people were asking questions about, "Was Cory, her husband, involved? Have I spoken more to Amanda?" And a lot of people did have questions that I wanted to bring more content out, because everybody was talking about it, and I didn't want people to feel like, "You just finished a podcast, and then that's it." And people were still left talking about it. With the docuseries, it was a case of, yeah, the podcast was hugely successful. But the story is really interesting, and it makes a really interesting TV docuseries. And without getting into boring weeds details, the industry has had a tough time in struggling to take risks. And with the TV docuseries, we know what *Scamanda* is. We watch it because there was a very successful podcast.

**Related:** [Find Out How Amanda Riley Tricked Her Loved Ones in the Shocking True Story Behind Scamanda](#)

**You mentioned getting to talk with Amanda. And I know you've been pretty exclusively the only person she's talked to on the outside world while in prison. Obviously, because you're a professional, you remain objective when it comes to the details of the story. But were you affected at all getting the chance to actually speak with Amanda and begin a relationship?**

Yes, in a way. And when you pointed out about, "Oh, you're a professional," and you've mentioned many times about being that neutral bit in the middle, that is really important. And because of that, it's important that I hear what happens from her. Because I've seen comments, like, "Oh, was I a bit soft on her?" And I'm not soft, I'm not hard, because that's not what I'm doing. I want to bring you the depth of this nuanced story and the complexity of it. And I want you to feel it, and I want you to decide what you think. And so my job is to make sure that that is presented. Now imagine if I'd have gone, "There's this monster, she's fake, and everybody hated her. The end." It wouldn't have been interesting. And so when I actually did speak to Amanda, I contacted Amanda even before I started making the podcast, actually.

So even with the podcast to go to your question, I was informed about who Amanda was, from my POV anyway, and everybody else's, of course. But everybody's got their own individual [peace](#) and their hurt and their betrayal. And female friendships are really interesting I don't feel like we see enough of those stories. But then I came in as I wasn't harmed by it, so I'm coming in neutral. So it was important for me to say, "Okay, is Amanda this really horrible bad person? Is she this charming person? Is she somebody that it was all about money? 'I want some money, and I just thought I'd lie about cancer to get money?' Or was she somebody that was complicated, that needed validation, that was maybe addicted to the attention that she kept getting." And so it was important for me to get to understand that.

And with the podcast, if you've listened to it, there's a portrayal of Amanda in it and through her blog posts. And I worked really hard. I brought this voice over artist on, and I directed and worked really hard to try and be accurate with Amanda and not just have an idea of what maybe she was like. And then, as I went along, I did get to know Amanda better, and then heard her side or her truth, her side of the story, and whether she was remorseful. That was really important for me. And that did inform some of the decisions on the documentary because there are a few things that Amanda did tell me that she wanted to get across, which we do get across in the documentary.

**Obviously, you didn't create *Scamanda* with the intention of sending a moral. But is there something you believe people can take away from Amanda Riley's story, especially with many people being more online today than ever?**

Absolutely, and I'm so pleased you asked that question. Because, like I just hopped on about, I'm here to be neutral and present a story, true story. But I also am attracted to these stories, and I really worked so hard on it and lived it so that I could maybe have some kind of impact in telling this. It's a very interesting story to me. I love psychology. I wrote a book called *Why It's Ok to Talk about Trauma*. I love complex human behavior, and I love that sometimes, we don't talk about that with women enough.

And so, yes, I think some of the things that I think we can learn from this is, one, understanding the subtleties of manipulative behavior. Because I think we still like to think that it's "a bad man" that jumps out at you. But often it's people you know. It's very subtle. It's grooming behavior, it's "love bombing" and being so charming. And so the podcast and the docuseries, I feel like really showcases how this could happen. And I've worked so hard at that, because a few people have said, "Oh, how could people fall for that?" Look, I really feel that if you were in that moment in time with Amanda, [reading](#) her blog posts, seeing the fact that she's fainting in church, that she's peeing her pants, that she's got a shaved head, that she's really not well, that she's going to hospital, and she's practicing her faith, and she's been kind to people. You wouldn't question that. And we don't.

But there were some red flags. And I think it's also about listening to our intuition. That intuition, which is the nagging thing behind us, sometimes it's easier to ignore it because we don't have to face reality. So to me, it's this is a showcase of in-depth manipulation, whether Amanda meant it or not, whatever her intention was, people really believed her to the very end. I remember speaking to somebody and phoning somebody, around the time of Amanda's sentencing. And they didn't know that Amanda had lied. And it was really difficult, because I had to tell them it was a lie.

So to that point, the other thing I wanted to say was that so many of us have been scammed. So many of us have been scammed, whether it's overtly. Or whether it's been manipulated and controlled in an intimate relationship, whether we've been betrayed in a [friendship](#), whether we've had awful betrayals in a [family](#) setting. And this is a family story, too. And I feel like hopefully seeing people's pain in [this or that](#), or how they grew, can help people feel less alone in their story, and also know that there should be no shame attached to this. Because I remember a lot of people said to me, "Is there something wrong with me? Am I naive? Why didn't I spot it?" And start to question themselves. Can they trust their own decisions? And the shame is misplaced. The shame shouldn't be on them that they're not naive. We all sometimes have these things happen to us. And so I think showing that it's okay and there's nothing to be ashamed at if you have been in a situation like like this, and then to maybe understand betrayals or vulnerabilities and manipulative behavior.

I really love your question, because I think there are so many things we can take from this. I always hate the word "scam." And the reason why is because, for me, in my head, I'm like, "A scam is something that's premeditated." It's one of these things where you answer the phone and they're like, "Hey, do you want to move your money to this?" Like telemarketing stuff. That's what I always see. Whereas this was very in-depth, and I'm not convinced it was premeditated by Amanda. And so what I do know is that it's very hard for law enforcement to stop these kinds of things, because they're very behavioral and the law is still really old-fashioned. Lying isn't against the law. So what I do know is



that *Scamanda* is being used by different law enforcement and police forces to help understand behavioral crimes and manipulative behavior. Because it was very hard for Detective Martinez to even go after Amanda because of HIPAA laws because they couldn't prove that she was lying about cancer. And if you lie about cancer, unfortunately, it's not against the law.

**Yeah, Amanda got eventually incarcerated for wire fraud. It's like how Al Capone got ultimately tried for tax evasion.**

Yes, the same thing, exactly so. And that's not really the story, right? It's not really about wire fraud. It is about complex human behavior and friendships, family and relationships, and why people do these things. And I think people are lost and look for inspiration and hope. And Amanda was that to a lot of people.

**Has working on the *Scamanda* docuseries given you any ideas for other stories, either ones you've covered or not, that you'd like to tell?**

I'm laughing because I'm on a shoot right now, which I can't wait to talk to you about in about five or six months' time. This one is, it's absolutely fascinating and, again, very complex behavior. It's very female. I'm not allowed to say anything, because it's not been announced yet. But it is a lot of betrayals and friendships, and then grows into this big thing. And I'd love for this to be a drama or something like that because I think it's such a fascinating story that I would love to be able to portray it in that way.

Another one, which I think would be great, is I made a podcast called *Surviving El Chapo*, where I partnered with 50 Cent and G-Unit. And I'd love to make that into a drama. Because it's about the Flores brothers, the twins that took down El Chapo. I think that should be a drama, because some of the things that I know and that I was told, you just can't believe how extreme it is really. And I think a drama would just be amazing to really show how El Chapo got taken down.



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