

Below is a **4-episode beat sheet** for *Burke and Hare*, structured it as a limited-series crime drama with three interlocking engines: Burke/Hare’s descent into murder, Knox’s professional hunger for bodies, and Johnson’s investigation into the anatomy trade.

## Series Beat Sheet: *Burke and Hare*

### Series logline

In 1828 Edinburgh, two desperate Irish labourers discover that the dead are worth more than the living, and their partnership with a celebrated anatomist fuels a killing spree that exposes the moral rot beneath science, poverty, ambition, and polite society.

### Episode 1 — “The First Subject”

Beat	Story Function	What Happens
<b>Opening Image</b>	Establish poverty, prejudice, and rage	Burke and Hare are denied dock work at Leith. Hare assaults the foreman after being insulted, immediately marking him as volatile, dangerous, and resentful of the city that rejects him.
<b>World Set-Up</b>	Introduce Edinburgh’s body economy	Dr Knox is interviewed by Archibald Johnson, who questions whether anatomy is being fed by stolen bodies. Knox insists he does not dig them up himself, but admits he does not investigate every “subject” delivered to him.
<b>Domestic Set-Up</b>	Establish the lodgings as moral pressure cooker	At Hare’s lodgings, Margaret, Helen, Burke, Hare, and sick old Donald live in poverty, drink, and resentment. Donald owes rent and appears close to death.
<b>Theme Stated</b>	Poverty plus opportunity corrodes conscience	The episode repeatedly asks what people will excuse when hunger, rent, status, and ambition are at stake. Knox wants bodies; Hare wants money; Burke wants escape; Johnson wants truth.
<b>Catalyst</b>	A dead lodger becomes a commodity	Donald dies naturally in the lodgings. Hare realises the body may be worth something to the university, not merely a burden to bury.
<b>Debate</b>	Is selling a body a crime or survival?	Helen objects and wants a priest. Margaret wants her share. Burke hesitates but is tempted by the promise of easy money. Hare contacts David Paterson at Surgeons’ Hall.
<b>Break into Two</b>	Burke and Hare enter the anatomy trade	They replace Donald’s body with bark and stones, transport the corpse in a tea chest, and deliver it to Knox’s circle.
<b>Midpoint</b>	Knox pays them	Knox examines the body, pays Burke and Hare handsomely, and tells them similar payments are guaranteed for future subjects. This is the decisive seduction.
<b>Bad Guys Close In</b>	The idea mutates	On the way home, Burke still frames it as a one-off, but Hare sees a business model. The line “the dead don’t talk” becomes the doorway into murder.
<b>All Is Lost / Moral Collapse</b>	They choose active killing	In the Blue Blanket Inn, Hare proposes that they “supply the doctor” their way. Margaret negotiates her cut. Helen warns she will deny knowledge, but stays.
<b>Episode Climax</b>	The first murder pattern begins	A montage implies multiple killings, marked by scratches on a prison wall. Burke and Hare then lure an Irish woman and her young grandson back to the lodgings.

Beat	Story Function	What Happens
Cliffhanger	Innocence witnesses evil	Hare murders the Irish woman. The boy wakes and sees what has happened. The episode cuts to black on the child's discovery.

**Episode 1 purpose:** It turns poverty into commerce, commerce into complicity, and complicity into murder.

## Episode 2 — “No Witnesses”

Beat	Story Function	What Happens
Opening Image	Immediate consequence of the cliffhanger	The boy cries for his grandmother. Helen tries to protect him, Margaret panics, Burke fears discovery, and Hare moves toward the unthinkable.
Catalyst	The child becomes a liability	Hare demands the boy be handed over. Helen and Margaret resist, but Burke sides with Hare, choosing self-preservation over mercy.
Break into Two	The gang crosses a deeper moral line	The implication is clear: the child is disposed of because he can identify them. The murders are no longer opportunistic; they are protected by further violence.
A Story Progression	Burke and Hare become practised killers	Their murders continue. The lodgings become a trap, with the women increasingly compromised and the tea chest functioning as the bridge between poverty and profit.
B Story Progression	Johnson's suspicion deepens	Johnson's interest in Knox and the resurrection trade becomes personal and investigative rather than merely journalistic. He starts connecting the university's appetite for bodies to a wider criminal system.
Knox Story	Knox senses danger but refuses responsibility	Knox benefits from the supply while keeping moral distance. His assistants are closer to the bodies, but Knox's ambition and need for specimens keep the machine running.
Midpoint	The murders broaden beyond the invisible poor	The gang's confidence grows. The pattern is no longer just old, sick, anonymous victims. They begin to see almost anyone vulnerable as a “shot” for the doctor.
Bad Guys Close In	Rumours begin to reach the medical world	Paterson warns Knox that a newsman is becoming a nuisance. Knox admits there is “a lot to find,” while Susan advises him to have words with his associates.
All Is Lost	Burke asserts himself	Burke brings Mary Paterson into the orbit of the lodgings, provoking Hare's anger because Burke has acted independently. Their partnership begins to fracture over control, ego, and profit.
Episode Climax	Mary Paterson is murdered	Burke attacks Mary; she fights back fiercely, biting him, before Hare finally helps restrain her. This murder escalates the danger because she is more identifiable and connected than earlier victims.
Cliffhanger	Recognition threatens Knox	In Surgeons' Hall, a body is recognised, and Dr Lonsdale reacts with shock in the theatre. The anatomy trade is beginning to expose itself from inside the institution.

**Episode 2 purpose:** It shows the murder trade becoming systematic, while the first cracks appear in both the criminal partnership and Knox's protective world.

### Episode 3 — “The Bubbles Rise”

Beat	Story Function	What Happens
<b>Opening Image</b>	Johnson goes undercover	In May 1828, Johnson meets Dapper on the Royal Mile. He is trying to infiltrate the resurrectionist network by posing as a new surgeon looking for suppliers.
<b>A Story</b>	Johnson hunts the supply chain	Johnson seeks Andrew Merrilees and moves closer to the criminal underworld that feeds the anatomy schools. He is no longer just writing about the scandal; he is risking himself inside it.
<b>B Story</b>	Knox’s public respectability contrasts with private corruption	The Knox sisters attend charity events and polite society, while Knox’s world remains dependent on illicit bodies. This contrast sharpens the theme: respectable Edinburgh is built beside its own moral sewer.
<b>C Story</b>	Burke and Hare’s partnership deteriorates	Hare wants control of the operation. Burke resents being treated as secondary. Margaret and Helen are trapped by what they know and what they have accepted.
<b>Midpoint</b>	Daft Jamie is targeted	Margaret lures Daft Jamie with food and drink. His innocence and recognisability make him a dangerous victim choice, but Hare and Burke proceed.
<b>Complication</b>	Knox’s circle can no longer pretend ignorance	Jamie’s body is recognised in the mortuary. Jones calls him “Daft Jamie” and notes he is local and young. Knox sees bruising but still orders the body taken to the theatre, refusing to question how Burke and Hare obtained him.
<b>Bad Guys Close In</b>	Johnson gains a living witness	Johnson learns from Janet Brown that Mary went with Burke. He persuades her to show him the dwelling, despite her fear of the place.
<b>All Is Lost</b>	Johnson almost walks into the killers’ reach	Johnson and Janet are nearly discovered by Hare in Tanner’s Close. Johnson has a pistol; Hare has a knife. Only Mrs Connaway’s interruption allows Johnson and Janet to escape.
<b>Final Turn</b>	Mrs Docherty enters the trap	On Halloween, Hare encounters Mrs Docherty at Rymer’s and manipulates Burke into taking her in, claiming she may be family. Burke is shaken by visions of the dead child, but the pattern continues.
<b>Episode Climax</b>	The last murder begins	Mrs Docherty cries “Murder!” from inside Burke’s lodging. Mrs Connaway hears noises through the wall, then a loud bump, then silence.
<b>Cliffhanger</b>	A witness is next door	For the first time, the killing is not fully hidden. The neighbour hears enough to make the murder visible beyond the gang.

**Episode 3 purpose:** It tightens the noose: the victims become more recognisable, Knox’s plausible deniability weakens, Johnson finds witnesses, and the killers finally make a mistake.

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### Episode 4 — “The Butcher and the Beef”

Beat	Story Function	What Happens
<b>Opening Image</b>	Burke tries to erase evidence	Burke pours whisky over the room and bed after Docherty’s murder, attempting to mask what happened. Mrs Gray enters and notices things are wrong, placing ordinary neighbours at the centre of the exposure.

Beat	Story Function	What Happens
<b>Catalyst</b>	The body is discovered / the story breaks open	Suspicion around Docherty becomes unavoidable. Witnesses, neighbours, and Johnson's inquiries converge on Burke, Hare, the lodgings, and Surgeons' Hall.
<b>Break into Two</b>	The authorities move from rumour to prosecution	The case shifts from investigation into legal reckoning. The murder of Mrs Docherty becomes the charge that can finally be proved.
<b>B Story Payoff</b>	Hare turns King's evidence	Hare gives testimony describing the murder of Docherty, including how she was brought back, assaulted, killed, stripped, folded, and delivered to Surgeons' Hall.
<b>Midpoint</b>	Burke is isolated	Hare's testimony saves Hare while destroying Burke. The partnership ends as survival instinct takes over. Burke becomes the public vessel for all the murders, while Knox remains legally insulated.
<b>Bad Guys Close In</b>	The courtroom makes the horror public	Details of the murder trade reach the jury and gallery. The anatomy economy is dragged into daylight: bodies, tea chests, Knox's cellar, Paterson, and the money chain.
<b>All Is Lost</b>	Burke is condemned	Burke is left awaiting execution. In prison, he still obsesses over money owed by Knox and wanting respectable clothes for his public death, revealing how warped his sense of self has become.
<b>Dark Night of the Soul</b>	Burke faces the dead	Burke tells Johnson he has been tormented by visions since the first murder and confesses the full story in exchange for having his account recorded and authenticated.
<b>Finale — Phase 1</b>	Public execution	Burke is taken through a roaring crowd to the gallows. He acknowledges that he entered hell months earlier, then is hanged before tens of thousands.
<b>Finale — Phase 2</b>	The city turns the story into legend	The crowd chants the rhyme: "Burke's the butcher, Hare's the thief, Knox the man who buys the beef." The scandal belongs to the people now, not the courts.
<b>Final Image</b>	Poetic justice	Nine days later, Burke's body is wheeled into the anatomy theatre. Dr Monro unveils him for dissection, mirroring Knox's opening theatrical flourish. Burke becomes the thing he sold.

**Episode 4 purpose:** It delivers legal punishment, moral irony, and institutional ambiguity: Burke hangs, Hare survives, Knox is publicly damned but not truly punished, and the anatomy system consumes one of its suppliers.

## Overall Series Arc

### Stage      Series Movement

**Episode 1** Desperation discovers a market. Burke and Hare learn a body can be sold.

**Episode 2** The market becomes murder. The gang becomes a criminal machine.

**Episode 3** The machine becomes visible. Johnson, witnesses, and medical recognition close in.

**Episode 4** The machine breaks. Burke is sacrificed to public justice, while the wider system remains morally implicated.

## Core character arcs

**Burke** begins as a poor, resentful labourer following Hare's lead, then becomes more active, brutal, and competitive. By the final episode he is isolated, condemned, and transformed into the very anatomical commodity he once sold.

**Hare** begins as the more openly predatory force: opportunistic, controlling, and quick to violence. His arc is not remorse but survival; he ultimately weaponises testimony to save himself.

**Dr Knox** begins as a brilliant anatomist hiding behind professional necessity. Across the series, his refusal to question his supply makes him morally central even when legally distant.

**Archibald Johnson** begins as a sceptical journalist and becomes the moral investigator of the piece, pushing through institutional silence, criminal danger, and personal grief to expose the trade.

**Margaret and Helen** begin as women trapped by poverty and dependency. Their complicity grows through silence, bargaining, fear, and self-preservation until the lodgings become a shared moral grave.

#### **Tagline**

**In a city hungry for science, two men discover the price of a body — and the cost of a soul.**