

## VILLAINY PREVIEW STORY # 2

# Upping the Ante: A Peek into the Life and Times of Snakejuice Sam Denison

By John Anglin

Old Snakejuice Sam was one low down varmint. He was the type of fella that made cutthroats look like choir boys and desperados look like deacons. It was said when Snakejuice was born his mama's heart plum gave out because she had brought such a mean baby into the world. His pa raised him up in the hills all alone. In fact that is how he came by the name Snakejuice. He was raised on a mix of goat's milk, moonshine, and a touch of rattlesnake venom, so the story goes. Sam was so bad he shot his own pa dead when he was just four years old, just for sassing him. Yup, that Snakejuice Sam Denison was one bad hombre.

Just the sight of him was enough to make most folks know they wanted to be far away. He wore a wide brimmed old farmer's hat. He took it off a scarecrow just before setting the crops of a whole county in Kansas on fire a week before harvest just to see if the corn would pop. Some would say Snakejuice had a lazy eye. He would tell you the other was just extra keen. He had a broad smashed up nose as crooked as the Rio Grande it had been broken so many times. His face was covered in stubble as course as ten grit sandpaper.

He wore an old poncho that reeked of sweat and other things best left unmentioned. Across his chest he had a bandolier filled with shells. On his belt he wore a two gun rig. His left hip held a 32 caliber 7 shot British Bulldog. He loved watching that 7<sup>th</sup> round catch folks by surprise. On his right hip was a custom made double barrel sawed off twelve gauge with an ivory hilt that had the word thunder carved into it. His worn snakeskin boots had seen better days. He wore one spur on his left foot. The right one was probably still sticking into the rib of Snakejuice's last

horse. The one he rode now was an old swayback mare. Snakejuice didn't like horses and they didn't care too much for him either.

Snakejuice sat on the ridge looking down into the valley. The small town below was Willow Springs, where the territories judge was suppose to be. He planned on being done with his business here and back on the trail by the end of the day. He chomped down on the cigar he had been masticating all morning, leaned over and spit a nasty glob of tobacco juice right onto a patch of wild flowers. He prodded the horse into motion heading down the trail into the valley.

William Hensley waved to the townsfolk as he rode by on his handsome bay stallion. A spotless cream colored hat was tipped to ladies old and young alike. A big bright smile was flashed to one and all. Sheriff William's badge gleamed in the morning sun as he rode to the edge of town. William was a good man. He wasn't an overly bright man, but he was a good one. When he got to the edge of town he saw the stranger coming down the ridge. That man didn't look so good. It didn't take long for William to recognize Snakejuice from his wanted poster. William decided to wait for him. It seemed he was going to get to do some sheriffing this morning.

Snakejuice studied the man waiting in the road as he made his way down the switchback. That was a lawman if Snakejuice had ever seen one. He smiled to himself. Nothing made Snakejuice happier than starting out his day by shooting a lawman. He ambled the rest of the way down the ridge in a cheery mood. When he got within hollering distance he called out, "Morning sheriff!"

William replied, "Good morning."

He looked Snakejuice over as he approached. He wanted to make sure he had the right man. Snakejuice stopped a few feet in front of him and William was sure it was him.

"You're Sam Denison aren't you?" William asked.

"Yup, that's me," Snakejuice beamed.

"I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to hand over your guns and come with me," William said matter of fact.

"Is there a problem Sheriff?"

“I’m afraid there is a matter that needs clearing up Sam. I’m going to need those irons now,” William replied.

“Well sure sheriff, I want to clear up any misunderstandings right quick. I ain’t one for having doubters.”

Snakejuice slipped the bulldog from his holster nice and easy. Gripping it by the barrel he extended it hilt first to the sheriff. William smiled at Sam’s reasonable response, ambling his horse forward to relieve Sam of his pistol. Just as fast as a duck on a junebug Snakejuice had Thunder in hand. The crack of the 12 gauge peeled down the main strip just like the hog leg’s namesake. William flew from his saddle. His bay reared and raced off out of town.

Snakejuice hopped off his horse with a chuckle. He looked down at the mess of a sheriff. His nice cream colored hat was quickly becoming burgundy as the pool of blood spread in the dirt. Snakejuice picked up his pistol shaking his head. Lawmen were so gullible. He saddled his mare and headed for the saloon down the street knowing that eyes were peeking out from behind curtains. Snakejuice didn’t mind, it wouldn’t be the last killing of the day by his reckoning.

He reloaded both of Thunder’s barrels as he rode down the street. He lashed his mare so that if she strained real hard she would just barely be able to get to the water trough. When he strode into the saloon he gave it a quick once over as he stepped up to the bar. Other than a couple fellas playing poker the saloon was empty this early in the day. The barkeep was sweating profusely and slightly shaking under Snakejuice’s gaze.

“Whiskey,” Snakejuice demanded.

The barkeep poured him a shot, getting most of it in the glass.

“Leave the bottle,” Snakejuice snarled, making the barkeep jump back.

The small man nodded quickly, putting as much pinewood as he could between himself and his newest patron. Snakejuice grinned an ugly rotten smile at the man and tipped back the whiskey, draining the shot without so much as a blink. He felt the barrel under his chin just a split second before the shot was fired. Blam!

“Yeeehaawwww!” the young man hooted. “I did it! I killed Snakejuice Sam Denison! Ya’ll remember you were here the day the Cripple Creek Kid killed Ol’ Snakejuice.”

He spun his shiny colt back in his holster. The fringe from his buckskins danced as the kid twirled back over toward the poker table. For the second time that morning Thunder cracked. Yup, a storm was brewing, Snakejuice reckoned. The kid flew through the fancy plate glass window onto the porch. Snakejuice stumbled forward, pulling the Bulldog. He looked down on the youth through the shattered window and fired all seven rounds into the Kid. Snakejuice reloaded and holstered his guns watching the unmoving men in the saloon. His face bloody, gore leaking out from under his chin, he made his way back to the bar.

“Somebody oughta told that boy ‘bout counting chickens,” Snakejuice slurred, a strange wet whistling sound accompanying his words.

He took a hefty slug off the whisky bottle with about half of it spilling from the hole in his jaw.

“Jumping Jesus that burns!” Snakejuice exclaimed.

“You go fetch the doc,” he pointed at one of the other men at the poker table. “And ya better be quick or else these other two are going to be asking the Cripple Creek Kid just what he was thinking.”

The man nodded and scrambled for the doors. The other men looked like they were desperately hoping their fellow didn’t split on them. The barkeep huddled behind the bar. Snakejuice whipped out a bandana and held it under his jaw. He probed the hole under his jaw line with his tongue, sending a fresh wave of pain cascading through his head. It seemed like it took a month of Sundays for the doctor to show up. Snakejuice noted the absence of the fella he sent to fetch him and reminded himself to save the craven a bullet if their paths crossed again.

Doc Forrest was in awe of the wound and how anyone could be so lucky as to get shot under the chin and have the bullet fly out their mouth only chipping a tooth and missing bone, tongue, and arteries. It had him dumbfounded. Snakejuice’s request was only slightly more disturbing to him.

“That’s right Doc. I said cauterize it,” Snakejuice whistled. “I ain’t got time to be layed up in no sickbed, nor time fer no stitches. You ain’t knocking me out either. I’ll take two more swigs of this here rotgut then you are gonna do it or I’m gonna plug ya.”

Snakejuice waved the Bulldog for added incentive. Doc Forrest needed no such reminder. He preferred to remain intact and unplugged.

“It’s going to hurt like the devil and once it’s done there won’t be anything for it later,” Doc Forrest said as he heated his small forceps that he figured would do the trick.

“Just get to it Doc,” Snakejuice grumbled as he took his second swig off the now mostly empty bottle of whiskey.

The remaining men in the Saloon looked on in part amazement part horror at the events unfolding before their eyes. Doc Forrest waited till the forceps were red hot then without so much as an ‘are you ready’ turned and popped them into the bullet hole. The smell of seared flesh wafted in the air. Snakejuice pounded the bar like a chain gang working on the rail. Doc looked at the wound.

“Well that should do it. It stopped bleeding, but you really should take it easy for a couple days,” Doc suggested.

“I got one bit of business to attend to first then I will try to heed your advice Doc,” the whistle seemed to be even more pronounced now that the wound wasn’t bleeding.

With a tip of his hat to the doc Snakejuice turned and walked out onto the deserted street. He made his way down to the courthouse, leaving his mare tied to the post in front of the saloon.

Snakejuice walked up to the courthouse and kicked open the doors. A mousey looking clerk let out a squeal as he dove under his desk. Snakejuice smiled. Nothing warmed his heart like striking terror in folks. An office door flew open.

“What in tarnation is going on out here?” Judge Reed hollered before his eyes landed on Snakejuice who had Thunder in hand and a mixture of saliva and blood leaking out what Snakejuice was beginning to think of as his blowhole.

Judge Reed grimaced.

“What do you want?” Reed asked hesitantly.

“You the territory Judge?” Snakejuice whistled.

Judge Reed steeled himself.

“I am.”

“I’m here to collect this reward,” Snakejuice said, pulling a wanted poster from under his poncho. “Says I’m worth eight hundred dollars.”

Judge Reed looked baffled.

“I don’t think anyone has ever tried to collect a reward by turning themselves in.”

Snakejuice sauntered over to the judge.

“You do have the money don’tcha? I heard this here courthouse was where all the territorial monies were kept.”

Snakejuice smiled wickedly. Judge Reed looked a little nervous.

Snakejuice continued. “Ya know I reckon maybe that reward oughta be a bit more seeing as how I just killed the sheriff this morning, and I suppose they might even jump it up a bit for the youngster that fancied himself a gunslinger.”

Judge Reed looked upset and scared all at the same time, his face turning as red as any barn on the prairie.

“But I figure what will really drive up the offer is killing a judge.”

Judge Reed’s face turned to one of horror as he realized what Snakejuice meant.

Boom!

Yup, a storm was coming and its name was Snakejuice Sam Denison.

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Look for this and 22 other exciting stories in the upcoming Hall Brothers Entertainment anthology VILLAINY, available June 9<sup>th</sup>.

