

THE MEDUSA'S MANE

The head of a medusa is adorned with a mane of snakes. It is difficult for a human to understand the relationship between the medusa and her serpents: are they independent, living creatures, or simply extensions of the medusa herself? Do the motions of this serpentine mane reflect the emotions of the medusa, or are the serpents themselves studying their surroundings?

The truth lies somewhere in between. The serpents can be controlled by the medusa. In battle, she can strike at her enemies using the venomous fangs of her serpents. She can cause them to be still and silent when she is being stealthy. But when she does not direct the serpents, they will move on their own. In general, the actions of the serpents reflect the emotions of the medusa. If she is angry, her serpents will hiss and threaten the subject of her ire; if she is depressed, the serpents may cling to her neck and shoulders, as if they are embracing her.

This article presents two new options for medusas: a new feat available to all medusas, and a character option available to medusas following certain classes.

Serpentine Bond

Among most races, sorcerers and wizards summon familiars, while druids and rangers form bonds with animal companions. While medusas can follow these traditional paths, a medusa may set aside these options in order to develop a stronger connection to the serpentine spirit that lies within her – a force reflected in her mane of living hair.

It is up to the individual DM to decide whether to allow this option, and if so, whether it should be available to both classes that use animal companions and those that summon familiars. In either case, serpentine bond replaces the relevant class feature for the medusa; a wizard who forms a serpentine bond cannot later decide to summon a familiar.

The serpentine bond enhances the powers of a medusa's mane of snakes and provides her with other abilities, as shown below.

Class	Venom	Special
Level	DC	
1st-2nd	+1	Alertness, ophidian influence
3rd-5th	+2	Restless mane
6th-8th	+2	Scent
9th-11th	+3	Serpentine focus
12th-14th	+3	<i>speak with serpents</i>
15th-17th	+4	Flurry of bites
18th-20th	+4	Serpent's vigil

Class Level: The character's level in the class that would normally provide her with an animal companion or familiar. A medusa ranger is treated as a druid of half her class level, as if determining the power of an animal companion. If the medusa is a member of multiple classes with these features, she may add her class levels together to determine the power of her mane.

Venom DC (Ex): This bonus applies to the saving throw DC of the medusa's bite attack. If she assumes a serpent form using wild shape, it enhances the venom of this form, as well.

Alertness (Ex): A medusa's living hair enhances her senses, granting Alertness as a bonus feat.

Ophidian Influence (Su): The medusa receives a +4 bonus to wild empathy and Handle Animal checks made to influence any sort of snake or serpent.

Restless Mane (Ex): At 3rd level and beyond, a medusa's serpentine hair can protect her as she sleeps. The serpents can use the medusa's Listen and Spot modifiers to monitor her surroundings. She can instruct the serpents to wake her at any sign of trouble, or to respond to specific triggers.

Scent (Ex): For most serpents, the sense of smell is far more important than sight. At 6th level the medusa gains the ability to process the olfactory data gathered by her serpent mane, providing her with the Scent ability.

Serpentine Focus (Ex): Starting at 9th level, a medusa can use her serpents as a channel for her magic. When she uses a spell with a range of touch, she may deliver it as part of an attack made with her serpent mane. In addition, when she uses the spell *poison* in this manner, the DC of the spell is increased by the same bonus she receives to the venom DC of her serpent mane.

Speak with serpents (Sp): At 12th level, the medusa gains the ability to *speak with serpents* at will. This is identical to *speak with animals*, but can only be used on ophidian creatures.

Flurry of Bites (Ex): At 15th level, the medusa's serpentine mane becomes more aggressive. When making a full attack, she can choose to make a second bite attack; both attacks suffer a -2 penalty. She cannot make a flurry of bites when using serpentine focus to deliver a touch attack.

Serpent's Vigil (Ex): At 18th level and above, the medusa gains a great ability to see through the eyes of her serpentine mane. She gains all-around vision, and cannot be flanked. She loses these benefits for one round any time that she makes a bite attack.

New Feat: Distilled Poison [Racial]

Your serpent mane can produce significant quantities of venom, and you can apply this poison to weapons or blend it with other liquids.

Prerequisites: Medusa, Con 13+, combined hit dice and class levels of 9 or greater.

Benefit: As a full-round action, you may milk poison from your serpent mane. This venom can either be applied to a weapon or placed in food or drink as an ingested poison. If the target weapon or substance is on hand, you may apply the poison as part of the full-round action; otherwise you may store the poison in a vessel for later use. You do not risk poisoning yourself when using your own venom.

This distilled medusa venom retains its potency for ten minutes; if it is not used in this time, it becomes inert.

You may use this ability a number of times per day equal to your Constitution modifier.

Normal: A medusa can only use its poison when making a bite attack.