

The Solarium

Aboard smaller, deep-orbit space stations, hydroponics facilities serve an essential function. Cultivable plant-life acts as an incredibly efficient means of oxygen recycling, helps to maintain cabin humidity and atmospheric makeup, and can supplement the crew's diet with fresh greens and herbs. A large, well-maintained hydroponic garden can provide food and breathable air to a crew of dozens, or even hundreds. On larger stations, however, hydroponic facilities are seen as largely obsolete. Oxygen is generally recycled through massive chemical-ventilation cycles, food brought in from off-station, and humidity set at a single level; bone-dry, always.

But, cultivating a touch of greenery entails benefits beyond just practical means. Underestimating the psychological impact of having even a puny garden is pure folly. Real, natural growth provides a sense of home, belonging, and organic beauty that is very often missing aboard the metallic sterility of a space station.

And the garden within House Qel'Droma's new headquarters is by no means puny.

The hydroponics facility takes up the whole of the Shadowfort's east-most tower, composed of shining white allusteel. All nine stories are left open to each other, designed to create a miniature replica of a natural atmosphere, with a shining 'solar fountain' at the very top, providing artificial sunlight for the plantlife below. Several miniature, artificial waterfalls flow down to the ground floor, feeding the shallow pools that cover most of its surface area, just deep enough to swim through... although such activity is *technically* prohibited. Multiple layers of bridges and walkways arc over the ponds, connecting to small foot-paths that cut through mossy beds of soil. Fed by the water, the sunlight, and maintained by dozens of robotic attendants, the garden on the ground floor is rich with life. Thousands of different plant species from a multitude of worlds are grown; tall, springy tropical trees from Selen sprout through the gaps in the walkways, joined by great, baby-wroshirs from Kashyyk, stretching all the way to the sixth story. There are small, decoratively trimmed tschupera bushes, copied from the avenous of coruscant, and great swaths of bryophytes; singing ferns from Corellia, glass ferns from Haruun-Kal, and tall, lacy feather-ferns from Yavin-4. From Felucia come phosphorescent lichens, shining in the shadowy undergrowth, and crystalline, multi-chromatic bell-heads. Endor's historic moon provides creep-vines and monk-lilies, floating peacefully across the pools of water. Barabells, kasavas, jorgan fruit, and countless other fruits and veggies are grown in thick, multi-colored clusters, harvested on occasion by the headquarters kitchen staff.

Most abundant are the flowers. They spring from the undergrowth like glowing jewels, spots of jewel-like color cutting through the green. Blood flowers, plum blooms, and extremely rare Tarisian roses, beloved of love-sick courtiers, are like rubies, bright red in the emerald expanse. Blueblossoms, Ithorian roses, and lyris blooms stand like sapphires, deep and blue and the void. Honeyblossoms and Sunneydews sparkle like golden topaz, while tiny, graceful pinpricks of Starbust and Snowblossom shine like diamonds, vivid and pure.

Metal trellises, hanging soil beds, and creeping vines cover the whole of the perimeter, shading a spiral staircase that runs all the way to a small lounge near the very top. The lounge is inset into the tower's wall, shaded from the artificial sun by a thick screen of hanging vegetation. Just enough light shines through to read by, for which a small case of donated books and scrolls has been provided, free to use by any operative.

The Solarium is a place of rest, repose, and peace. The Force is strong there, thrumming amidst the tangle of so much tranquil life. A spot of beauty, in a place where so many shadows lie.