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On a train with direc
PAUL FEIG & novel
GARY SHTEYNGA

+ DOES YOUR HOT
HAVE ROBOT BUTLER

THE
VISIONARIES
ISSUE





The salon-style dining room at the Albert at Hotel EMC2 in Chicago.

Beep. Boop. Butlers

Booking a vacation at Chicago's new "art and science" hotel will make you a hero to your kids. But at what cost?

The first thing you notice about the hospitality robots at Hotel EMC2—a new “art and science” boutique hotel in downtown Chicago—is that they look like R2D2, if the *Star Wars* character had given up a career in defending the galaxy to deliver toothbrushes to tourists in the Midwest.

Even before you set eyes on any robots, the hotel, a 195-room development from the Marriott Autograph Collection, promises to appeal to your inner science nerd. Billing itself as a luxury experience “geared toward both left- and right-brained guests,” the decor feels like a Neil deGrasse Tyson fever dream. The lobby features a 19th-century zoetrope machine with a hand crank. The elevators are color-coded—R, G and B, the three primary colors of the spectrum—and the hallway art is digitally animated, so each piece seems to be getting “painted” in real time by

an invisible brush. Room numbers are hidden behind a backlit magnifying glass, and the rooms, inspired by 1920s laboratories, come equipped with test tube nightlights, a funky glass-enclosed Star Trek transporter in the middle of the room (which sadly turned out to be just a shower) and a metallic horn amplifier that turns your smartphone into a gramophone, allowing you to fill the room with music.

But back to the robots.

That’s why I brought my family for a weekend stay at the Hotel EMC2. The two on-call, autonomous droids are named Leo and Cleo. We barely got into our room before my seven-year-old, Charlie, announced that testing the limits of EMC2’s robot staff would be

his top priority. We sent a text to the special number provided by the front desk and asked for a nail file. Within minutes, there was a ring at our front door, and Charlie leapt off the bed, shouting, “The robots are here, the robots are here!” Behind the door was Leo, a three-foot-tall silver automaton that resembles a fancy vacuum cleaner. Its headplate opened to reveal the nail file, and a screen prompted us to “please remove your items.”

We weren’t given a lot of parameters with the bots—the front desk informed us that Leo and Cleo couldn’t bring booze to our room, but were otherwise vague about what requests were off-limits. Within the first hour, Charlie sent robot requests for a birthday cake



(he settled for cupcakes), balloons (delivered), something chocolaty (we dined on macaroons and chocolate truffles), bacon (we got a free voucher for the breakfast buffet) and “surprise me” (Leo brought us a DO NOT DISTURB sign and some headphones).


It’s amazing how quickly you can get used to having electric butlers at your disposal. My attitude changed almost instantly from “this is bizarre” to “call the robot!” Still, living amongst them can make you slightly uneasy. I know how to interact with hotel humans—I’m pretty good at small talk and knowing when to slip dollars into palms—but with droids, I’m awkward. At one point, I rode an elevator with Cleo—it was just the two of us—and I found myself pretending to look at texts on my phone. Then I said, “Bet you’re happy the weekend is almost over, huh?” He didn’t respond.

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The evening ended—and this almost never happens in our family—without any histrionics. There were no tantrums from Charlie, loudly proclaiming his boredom at being confined to a hotel room. As my wife and I sipped brown liquors and admired the Chicago skyline, he quietly entertained himself, texting requests to his new animatronic friends long past his bedtime. The fact that the EMC2 manager didn’t once respond with “Go home, room 1702; you’re drunk” was a testament to their professionalism.

It used to be that kids were impressed when a hotel had a pool and a free buffet. But we’re heading to a future where if there aren’t cyborg playdates willing to bring them toys and cake and become their personal *Lost in Space* robot nannies, there’ll be no pleasing them. Ball’s in your court, Hampton Inn.

By Eric Spitznagel

 Hotel EMC2, Autograph Collection, is located at 228 E Ontario Street in Chicago’s Streeterville neighborhood, near the Magnificent Mile.

The Bridge Room at Common House, where guests can order drinks through a secret window to the bar



King Cone
MANHATTAN These days, everything from pudding and muffins to granola is getting infused with matcha, the antioxidant-rich, metabolism-boosting Japanese superfood made from powdered green tea leaves. At Matcha n’ More in New York’s Chinatown, healthy and decadent aren’t mutually exclusive: Their green soft-serve receives the Midas touch with a coating of 24-karat gold leaf.



Southern Comforts

CHARLOTTESVILLE As the work-life divide gets blurrier by the year, a new kind of establishment has cropped up: coworking space by day, social club by night. (See SoHo House’s 18 locations around the world.) That trend has now found its way south with Common House, in the recently restored Mentor Lodge in Charlottesville, Virginia, an early-20th-century African-American social club where Otis Redding once serenaded members. The downtown hot spot aims to bring together creatives of all stripes, from photographers and bluegrass musicians to entrepreneurial grads of UVA’s Darden School of Business (one of Common House’s founders is an alum). That eclectic character extends to the staff of the restaurant, where the chef is a whole-hog butcher and the manager is a former maitre d’ at Thomas Keller’s Per Se; and to the cozy Bridge Room, where acoustic acts like Josiah Johnson perform between seminars on bourbon distilling, knife-making and beekeeping. Membership also gets you perks like weekend access to the infinity pool at the Clifton Inn, a historic estate six miles east, in Shadwell, that was once home to Thomas Jefferson’s daughter.

Boston Tea Party
BOSTON Steps from Amtrak’s Back Bay station, the luxury tea brand Tea Forté recently opened its first permanent flagship store on Newbury Street. Sippers can relax with a cup in the upstairs fireplace lounge or shop its full selection of 93 handcrafted teas and teaware, from ceramic mugs to platinum infusers, including the origami-inspired Zakuro Iron Teapot, pictured here, made in Japan by teapot master Iwachu.

