Attack of the terrifying robot vacuum



Enlarge / Terrifying in the wrong context.

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Earlier this week, alarmed in the middle of the night by a noise downstairs, a North Carolina man named Thomas sent his wife to “a safe place” and then grabbed his phone to flip on some smart lights in the kitchen. He picked up his gun and joined his wife, who called the police. As they were waiting, the couple listened to the intruder below.

“We heard more noises downstairs and were increasingly alarmed,” wrote Thomas on social media the next day. “All my

military training came back to me, I started analyzing the path the intruder would take, their line of fire if they entered the room in certain ways, and where we should be to decrease our risk of getting hurt. All I kept thinking about and listening for was my little 2 year old next door to us, alone, and sound asleep. I was ready to do whatever I needed to do if I heard her door open."

The cops arrived and entered the lower level of the house. Thomas had his gun pointed at the bedroom door as he listened to the cries of "Sheriff's office!" below. The 911 dispatcher, who was still on the phone, soon told Thomas to put down his weapon and go talk to the police. Thomas left the bedroom.

> *The police all had their lights shining up the stairs, I put my hands so they could see me, I was only in my boxers, lovely…I know.*
>
> *They all started holstering their weapons and said "Sir, I have one question…"*
>
> *Me with adrenaline flowing rapidly, "Sure."*
>
> *Police, "Is this ROOMBA yours?"*

Yes, it was the family's new Christmas Roomba robotic vacuum, which had "somehow turned itself on and was vacuuming our house without us having scheduled it." It had gotten stuck and was making some terrible bumping noises. The police were good sports about it, though Thomas noted that "4 police officers got body cam footage of an almost nude and ashamed home owner."

The Forsyth County Sheriff's Office liked the story so much, it republished the post on its official Facebook page, generating local and national news reports about the incident.

We like to think of it as a little Christmas parable about technology, which has given us guns, Alexa, smartphones,

bodycams, and Roombas—but which still hasn’t found a way to shut off that stab of fear when you hear something strange go bump in the night. Happy holidays, Ars readers—and stay safe out there.

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