

SILVERFISH IN THE CATHEDRAL

\$SLVR

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FADE IN.**EXT. ANCIENT SPIRES OF THE VATICAN - NIGHT**

Thunder cracks across the night sky, splitting the darkness above the rain-slick domes. Misty blue light from distant floodlamps struggles against deep shadowy blacks and aged stone grays. The wind howls through the spires, carrying the faint scent of wet stone and incense from below.

JOE steps into frame, a gaunt man in his fifties, ringed eyes heavy with fatigue. Grease-stained coveralls cling to his weary frame. One gloved hand grips a battered toolkit, the other clutches a pesticide sprayer already beaded with rain. He pauses at the edge of the plaza, boots planted on slick cobblestones, and lifts his gaze toward the illuminated domes.

Lightning flashes, turning the gilded crosses atop the spires into brief crimson accents against thunderous night grays. Rain drums steadily on the ancient stone, running in rivulets down carved saints and gargoyles. Joe's breath fogs in the cold air. He shifts the toolkit higher on his shoulder, the metal clinking softly against the sprayer's nozzle.

A wide-angle view captures the full sweep of the Vatican's spires under the storm, domes glowing faint candlelight yellow against the roiling clouds. Shadows dance across the wet stone, elongated and restless. Joe remains still, head tilted back, water tracing lines down his face and dripping from his chin onto the coveralls.

He takes a single step forward, boots splashing through a shallow puddle that reflects the flickering lights above. The wind tugs at his sleeves. Somewhere in the distance, a bell tolls once, low and mournful, swallowed by another rumble of thunder.

Joe exhales, shoulders slumping slightly beneath the weight of the toolkit. His eyes stay fixed on the highest dome, where rain streaks the gold like tears. The handheld frame inches closer, shallow focus tightening on the droplets sliding across his weathered skin and the faint tremor in his gloved fingers around the sprayer's handle.

INT. VATICAN ARCHIVES - NIGHT

Handheld camera tracks forward through rows of gilded relic cases that gleam under flickering candlelight. Thick incense coils in the air, catching faint yellow beams that cut through deep shadow. Aged stone walls press close, their gray surfaces mottled with crimson accents on hanging tapestries.

Joe steps into frame, coveralls stained with grease, gloved hand tight on the pesticide sprayer. His battered toolkit clinks against his hip. Ringed eyes scan the dim space as he moves between the cases.

The Priest stands half-lit at the far end, black robes blending into the darkness, white collar a stark slash of pale. His hands tremble at his sides. A single candle gutters on the nearest case, throwing gilded edges into sharp relief.

JOE

Father? Dispatch said silverfish. Said they were eating through the old wood.

The Priest turns slowly, face drawn and bloodless in the shallow focus. His eyes linger on the sprayer before lifting to Joe's face.

THE PRIEST

They are not ordinary pests, my son. The cases... they whisper when the lights go low.

Joe sets the toolkit down on the stone floor. The sound echoes, swallowed quickly by the incense-heavy air. He adjusts his grip on the sprayer, nozzle aimed low.

JOE

Whisper how? I just need access to the baseboards and the shelves. Won't take long if I start now.

The Priest steps closer, robes whispering against the floor. Candlelight catches the tremor in his fingers as he reaches toward a nearby case, then stops.

THE PRIEST

Start where the silverfish gather. But listen first. Some of these relics still remember who held them.

Joe glances at the nearest case. A faint scratching sound rises from inside the wood, rhythmic and wet. The flame beside it dips, then steadies. He shifts his weight, boots scraping stone.

JOE

All right. I'll spray the perimeter, see what comes out. You might want to step back.

The Priest remains where he is, pale face half in shadow, eyes fixed on the case as the scratching grows louder.

INT. VATICAN ARCHIVES - NIGHT

Dim candlelight flickers across rows of gilded relic cases, their gold leaf catching faint yellow glints against deep stone grays. Thick incense hangs in the air, coiling like mist through shallow-focus shadows. Handheld camera tracks forward as JOE, gaunt and fiftyish in grease-stained coveralls, shoulders his battered toolkit and grips the pesticide sprayer with gloved hands. His ringed eyes scan the cases while THE PRIEST stands nearby, pale face drawn, black clerical robes whispering against crimson accents on the nearest reliquary.

THE PRIEST

They appeared three nights ago. Silverfish, but not the ordinary kind. They bore straight into the oldest relics, the ones sealed since the tenth century.

Joe sets the sprayer down and leans close to a cracked case, its glass filmed with dust. Tiny silver trails glint under the wavering light. He pries the lid with a gloved thumb, revealing yellowed parchment curling at the edges.

JOE

These things eat paper, cloth, bone. Anything organic.

THE PRIEST

(trembling hands clasped)

Not these. The infestation moves. One case empties and the next fills overnight. The archivists refuse to enter after dark. They say the silverfish carry... echoes.

Joe straightens, toolkit clinking. He sprays a fine mist along the base of a case carved with papal seals. The chemical hisses, mixing with incense. Shadows shift across his weary posture as the camera pushes in on a single silverfish darting across gilded wood, then vanishing into a seam.

THE PRIEST

Cardinal Rossi's ring was found covered in them this morning. The stone inside the setting had turned to dust. We sealed the wing, but the problem spreads.

JOE

You called an exterminator for dust?

THE PRIEST

I called because the silverfish are not alone. Listen.

A low rustling rises from the far cases, like pages turning in the dark. Joe tilts his head, sprayer raised. Candle flames dip and flare, throwing crimson accents across aged stone. The Priest's breath fogs faintly in the chilled air.

THE PRIEST

Whatever they carry, it remembers. The relics were never empty. Now something inside them is waking.

Joe moves to the next case, boots scraping stone. He opens his toolkit, metal tools glinting under faint light. The handheld frame tightens on his gloved fingers brushing a silver trail that leads toward a deeper vault door, half-lost in shadow.

INT. VATICAN ARCHIVES - NIGHT

Dim candlelight flickers across rows of gilded relic cases, their gold leaf catching faint yellow glints against aged stone walls. Thick incense hangs in the misty blue air, mixing with the sharp chemical tang of pesticide. Handheld camera drifts through shallow focus, shadows pooling deep and black between the cases.

JOE, gaunt and fiftyish with ringed eyes, stands in grease-stained coveralls. His gloved hands grip the battered pesticide sprayer. A weary slump in his shoulders, he triggers the nozzle. A fine mist hisses out, settling over a crimson-draped reliquary.

THE PRIEST lingers in the shadows behind him, pale face half-lit, black robes blending into the gloom. His white collar stands stark. Trembling hands clutch at his sides.

JOE

These silverfish been chewing through the old wood?

THE PRIEST

They move in the night. We hear them.

Scratching inside the cases.

JOE

Incense won't stop 'em. This stuff will.

Joe sweeps the sprayer along the base of another case. The mist catches in the flickering light, swirling like breath. A low creak echoes from deep within the stone walls. The Priest flinches, one hand rising to steady himself against a gilded edge.

THE PRIEST

Father Rossi said the relics... they remember. The bugs, they come from inside.

JOE

Bugs come from damp. Nothing more.

Joe steps closer to a tall case holding a splintered wooden cross. He sprays again, the chemical hiss loud in the quiet. The Priest watches, breath shallow, eyes darting to the dark gaps between the relics.

THE PRIEST

You don't feel it? The cold moving with them?

JOE

I feel the job. You want the infestation gone or not?

The Priest's fingers twitch. He steps half into the light, face drawn tighter.

THE PRIEST

Just... be careful where you spray. Some things here are older than the church itself.

Joe pauses, sprayer lowered for a beat. He glances at the trembling priest, then resumes, the mist drifting toward the shadows where something small skitters out of sight.

INT. VATICAN ARCHIVES - NIGHT

Handheld camera drifts through rows of gilded relic cases under dim flickering candlelight that barely cuts the thick incense haze. Aged stone walls bleed into deep shadow. Joe stands alone, gaunt and weary in grease-stained coveralls, his gloved hand steady on the pesticide sprayer. He sweeps the nozzle along a lower shelf, mist hissing into the cracks.

A faint scuttling sound rises from the nearest case. The camera pushes in shallow focus on the ornate gold trim. A single silverfish emerges, its metallic body catching the weak yellow light as it crawls across the velvet lining toward the edge.

Joe pauses. He lowers the sprayer. His ringed eyes narrow at the insect. The silverfish pauses too, antennae twitching, then slips over the rim and drops to the stone floor with a soft metallic tap.

The camera tracks the bug for a beat before pulling back to Joe. He steps closer to the open case, toolkit bumping against his leg. From inside the relic, a low, layered whisper begins, barely audible at first, like many voices overlapping in Latin. The sound grows, threading through the incense

smoke.

Joe leans in. His breath fogs the cold air around the case. The whispers resolve into distinct murmurs, urgent and ancient, pressing against the silence. He tilts his head, listening. The silverfish freezes on the floor near his boot, then darts beneath the case.

Joe reaches for his flashlight. The beam clicks on, casting a narrow cone that wavers in his unsteady grip. Inside the case, a small bone fragment shifts on its own, catching the light. The whispers swell, then cut off abruptly.

Joe stands motionless, sprayer dangling at his side. The only sound left is the faint hiss of settling incense and the distant creak of old wood. He exhales once, slow. His gloved fingers tighten around the handle of the sprayer.

INT. VATICAN ARCHIVES - NIGHT

Dim candlelight yellows flicker across aged stone grays and gilded relic cases, casting shallow shadows that shift like living things. Thick incense hangs in the air, mingling with the faint metallic tang of pesticide. Joe stands rigid in grease-stained coveralls, his ringed eyes fixed on a cracked reliquary where silverfish still twitch across crimson velvet lining. His gloved hand grips the sprayer tighter, knuckles white.

THE PRIEST

You have stopped. Why?

JOE

I saw it move. Not the bugs. The thing inside that box. It... remembered.

The Priest's pale face leans closer, trembling hands clutching his robes. His white collar catches a stray beam of light, stark against the deep blacks of the vaulted room.

THE PRIEST

Memories are not your concern. The infestation is. Continue.

JOE

This ain't normal silverfish. They crawled into a circle, spelled out words I don't even know. Latin, maybe. Something older. If the Vatican finds out I stirred this up...

THE PRIEST

They called you here to purge what hides in these cases. Nothing more.

Joe shifts his battered toolkit on his shoulder. The sprayer nozzle drips faintly onto the stone floor, each drop echoing in the misty blue gloom.

JOE

Report it. That's what I should do. Tell your bosses the relics are... awake. Let someone else deal with whatever's whispering back.

THE PRIEST

You would walk away from your duty? These walls have held their secrets for centuries. One man with a spray gun does not break them.

JOE

I ain't breaking nothing. I'm seeing it. That last case glowed when the bugs touched it. Like it was... breathing. You want me to keep spraying and pretend that didn't happen?

The Priest steps between Joe and the nearest relic case, his shadow stretching long and thin across gilded gold. Flickering light catches the sweat on his brow.

THE PRIEST

I want you to finish what you were paid to do. The Holy Father does not need reports of silverfish and shadows. He needs silence restored.

JOE

Silence. Right. Easy for you to say from up there in the collar. I'm the one standing in it.

Joe lowers the sprayer an inch, then raises it again. His weary posture bends slightly toward the door, then straightens.

THE PRIEST

You debate because you fear. Fear is the devil's tool here, not these relics. Spray. Or leave and explain to your own conscience why the job remained half done.

Joe exhales, breath visible in the chilled air. The silverfish in the open case begin to stir once more, tracing faint silver lines across the crimson fabric.

INT. VATICAN ARCHIVES - NIGHT

Handheld camera drifts through rows of gilded relic cases under flickering candlelight that barely cuts the deep shadows. Misty blue haze from incense coils around aged stone columns. Joe stands alone, grease-stained coveralls clinging to his gaunt frame, ringed eyes fixed on the nearest case. His gloved hand tightens on the pesticide sprayer. The battered toolkit hangs heavy at his side.

A low creak echoes from somewhere deeper in the stacks. Joe turns his head, shallow focus pulling the dim yellow glow of a single votive candle into soft blur behind him. Crimson accents on the case edges catch the light like fresh blood. He steps forward, boots scraping stone. The air thickens with the scent of old wood and myrrh.

JOE

(to himself)

Ain't no silverfish in here.

He pauses, listening. Something shifts inside the nearest case - a faint whisper of fabric or breath. Joe leans closer, breath fogging the glass.

Inside, a splintered bone fragment rests on velvet, catching faint gold highlights. His weary posture straightens. The sprayer lowers to his side.

Joe glances back toward the entrance, where the last thin strip of night-gray light leaks under the door. Thunder rumbles far above, shaking dust from the vaulted ceiling. He wipes a gloved palm across his face, then reaches for the latch on the next case down the row. The metal is cold, etched with faint Latin script.

JOE

Whatever's in these things... it's calling.

He unlatches the case. The door swings open with a soft groan. Inside, shadows pool thicker than the surrounding dark. Joe reaches in, fingers brushing the relic. A sudden draft chills the air around him, carrying the faint sound of distant chanting. His eyes narrow. The decision settles in his stance - shoulders squaring, toolkit lifted higher.

Joe steps past the open case and moves deeper into the archives, handheld camera tracking behind him through the narrowing aisles. Gilded edges blur into streaks of gold against black stone. The incense grows heavier, curling like living fingers. Another case rattles as he passes. Joe doesn't flinch. He keeps walking, sprayer now slung across his back like a weapon.

The light ahead thins to a single guttering flame. Joe pauses at the threshold of a narrower corridor lined with taller, darker cases. He adjusts his grip on the toolkit. The decision is made. He vanishes into the deeper dark.

INT. VATICAN ARCHIVES - NIGHT

Dim candlelight yellows flicker across rows of gilded relic cases, their gold leaf catching faint glints against aged stone grays. Thick incense hangs in the air, coiling like smoke from a dying fire. Handheld camera sways gently, shallow focus on dust motes drifting through the gloom.

Joe stands on a wooden ladder, grease-stained coveralls streaked darker at the knees, his gloved hand guiding the pesticide sprayer into a narrow gap behind a crimson-embroidered altar cloth. The sprayer hisses softly, a steady mist coating the wood.

THE PRIEST

They whisper when the lights are low. I hear them. Not words exactly. More like... recollections pressing against the glass.

Joe pauses, wipes his brow with the back of his glove, then resumes spraying. The mist catches the candlelight, turning briefly silver.

JOE

Silverfish don't whisper, Father. They chew. Slow. Steady. That's all this is.

The Priest lingers near an open case, pale hands trembling as he touches the edge of a reliquary. His black robes absorb the surrounding shadows, the white collar a stark cut against his throat.

THE PRIEST

This one belonged to a cardinal who sold indulgences for coin. The bones inside still feel warm some nights. I touched them once.

Saw his face. Felt the weight of every lie
he told.

Joe climbs down one rung, toolkit clinking against his hip. He sets the sprayer aside and pries open a warped panel with a screwdriver, the wood groaning.

JOE

I don't see faces. Just tunnels they leave
behind. You want me to seal those up or not?

The Priest steps closer, voice low, almost swallowed by the vaulted ceiling.

THE PRIEST

If the relics remember, then what do they
remember of us? The ones who locked them
here. The ones who pray over them and
pretend the past stays buried.

Joe works the panel loose, revealing a nest of silverfish scattering across gray stone. He reaches for a canister of powder, his ringed eyes narrowed in concentration.

JOE

Buried or not, they still need killing. Same
as rats in a basement.

The Priest's hands steady for a moment, then resume their tremor. He watches the insects flee into deeper cracks.

THE PRIEST

Sometimes I wonder if the silverfish are the
only honest things left in this place. They
don't pretend the wood is sacred. They
simply take what they need.

Joe dusts the powder along the baseboard, the fine white cloud settling like frost. Flickering light from a nearby sconce throws elongated shadows across the relic cases.

JOE

Honest don't mean harmless. You keep talking
like that, Father, and I'll start charging
extra for the listening.

The Priest exhales, a thin sound lost beneath the hiss of another spray. The camera tracks slowly along the wall, catching the glint of gold against deepening black.

INT. VATICAN ARCHIVES - NIGHT

Handheld camera drifts through rows of towering gilded cases, shallow focus catching faint candlelight yellows flickering across aged stone grays and crimson accents. Incense hangs thick in the misty blue air. Joe moves slowly between the shelves, grease-stained coveralls sagging on his gaunt frame, battered toolkit banging against one leg. His gloved hand grips the pesticide sprayer like a lifeline, ringed eyes scanning the dim corridor.

He stops before a tall case crowned with chipped gold leaf. Something inside glints. Joe sets the sprayer down, pries at the latch with a rusted screwdriver from his belt. The metal groans.

The lid creaks open. Inside rests a yellowed bone fragment wrapped in frayed silk, surrounded by dead silverfish curled like question marks.

Joe leans closer. The bone pulses once with faint gilded light. His breath catches.

A fleeting vision ripples across the frame: a young woman in threadbare robes kneels in a sunlit olive grove, hands pressed to a leper's ruined face. Crimson blood trickles from her palms yet the sores close beneath her touch. Thunder rumbles far away. She smiles, exhausted, as silverfish skitter across the dirt at her feet and vanish into the soil.

The image shatters. Joe stumbles back, knocking the case. The bone settles. Only the archives remain, shadows pooling deeper around him.

He wipes his brow with a gloved knuckle, staring at the empty air where the grove had been. His voice comes out hoarse, almost amused.

JOE

Well. That's new.

He reaches in again, fingers hovering just above the silk. The candle nearest the case gutters, throwing dancing shadows across his weary face.

INT. VATICAN ARCHIVES - NIGHT

A narrow aisle of gilded relic cases stretches into flickering candlelight. Misty blue shadows cling to aged stone walls. Crimson velvet drapes hang heavy with incense. Joe stands frozen, his grease-stained coveralls streaked with dust, gloved hands tight on the pesticide sprayer. His battered toolkit rests open at his feet. Faint candlelight yellows catch the ringed exhaustion in his eyes.

Silverfish pour from the seams of a reliquary. Dozens at first, then hundreds. Their silver bodies skitter across gold filigree, leaving trails of faint, pulsing light.

Joe steps back. The insects multiply across the marble floor. Their movement blurs into fragmented images: a medieval scribe's ink-stained fingers, a crusader's bloodied sword, a choir boy's trembling voice in Latin.

JOE

Christ. Not again.

The silverfish swarm up the side of a case. One pauses on a cracked icon. Joe's vision fractures. For a heartbeat the archive walls dissolve into a torch-lit chapel. He blinks hard. The vision snaps back to dim archives.

JOE

(whispering)

Get a grip, Joe.

More silverfish erupt from a velvet-lined drawer. They carry whispers with them, low and overlapping. Joe hears snatches of ancient prayers and screams. His posture sags. He swings the sprayer but his gloved finger hovers without pressing the trigger.

JOE

You're bugs. Just bugs.

A cluster climbs his boot. Joe shakes his leg violently. The silverfish scatter, each one briefly glowing with the face of a different forgotten owner before fading. His shallow breathing echoes off the stone. The

handheld light on his toolkit sways, throwing long shadows that twist like reaching hands.

JOE

(louder)

I came for silverfish. That's all.

The insects mass on a nearby case, forming a shifting silver river that spells out half-seen words in Latin. Joe's eyes widen. He stumbles sideways, knocking the toolkit. Tools clatter across the floor. The sound is swallowed by the growing hum of tiny legs.

JOE

No more. No more memories.

He grips the sprayer with both hands now, knuckles white, and aims at the nearest swarm. The silverfish pause as one, thousands of tiny eyes reflecting candlelight like distant stars. Joe's face drains of color. The archive seems to breathe around him.

INT. VATICAN ARCHIVES - NIGHT

Flickering candlelight yellows catch on gilded relic cases lining the stone walls. Thick incense hangs in the air, coiling through misty blue shadows. Joe moves slowly down the narrow aisle, grease-stained coveralls creaking, battered toolkit slung over one shoulder, pesticide sprayer gripped in gloved hands. The Priest trails a step behind, black robes whispering against the floor, white collar stark against his pale face.

JOE

Another one last night. The silverfish got into the third row. Same pattern as the others.

The Priest stops at a velvet-lined case. His trembling hands hover above the glass. Inside, a splintered wooden crucifix pulses with faint crimson light.

THE PRIEST

Sixteen cases now. They're multiplying faster than the records can track. Each relic carries its own memory, and the insects are waking them all.

Joe leans in, shallow focus tightening on the tiny silver bodies skittering beneath the glass. He taps the case once with a gloved knuckle. The sound echoes, swallowed by the vaulted dark.

JOE

Waking them to do what, exactly? I spray for bugs, not ghosts.

THE PRIEST

They don't want to be seen. That's why the relics remember. The fish feed on the forgotten names. Every bite pulls another voice back into the stone.

Joe straightens, weary posture shifting as he checks the sprayer's gauge under the dim light. Aged stone grays press close around them.

JOE

You called me here for silverfish. Now you're telling me the whole archive's talking. How many more before the basilica starts answering back?

THE PRIEST

The crypt inventory came in this morning. Twenty-three additional cases. The Bishop wants them sealed before dawn.

Joe adjusts his grip on the sprayer. The nozzle hisses faintly as he tests the pressure. Candle shadows dance across his ringed eyes.

JOE

Sealed won't stop what's already moving. I'll hit the new ones first. You mark the ones that spoke last.

The Priest nods, fingers tracing a small ledger pulled from his robe. His hands still tremble.

THE PRIEST

The golden chalice from the fourth century. It whispered a name I haven't heard since seminary. Then the fish poured out like water.

JOE

Names don't pay my invoice. Show me the chalice.

They move deeper into the aisle. Gilded edges catch the light, then fall back into deep shadowy black. The Priest's footsteps slow beside a tall case draped in crimson cloth.

THE PRIEST

This one opened on its own. The silverfish left a trail that spelled the same word three times.

Joe crouches, sprayer aimed low. The beam of his small work light cuts a narrow path through the incense.

JOE

Spell it for me anyway. I like to know what I'm killing.

INT. CRYPT BELOW THE BASILICA - NIGHT

A narrow stone staircase spirals downward, lit only by a single flickering candle in The Priest's shaking hand. Shadows stretch across damp walls etched with faded Latin inscriptions. The air thickens with incense and the smell of wet earth. Joe follows close behind, his battered toolkit clanking against his hip, pesticide sprayer gripped tight in gloved hands.

Joe descends the final steps and sweeps his flashlight beam across rows of stone vaults recessed into the walls. Gilded crosses glint faintly in the gloom. Silverfish skitter across the floor like living mercury.

JOE

Smells like the basement of every church I

ever sprayed. Same mold, same bugs.

THE PRIEST

These vaults hold fragments of the earliest martyrs. We must check each one.

Joe sets the sprayer down and pries open the nearest vault with a crowbar. Dust puffs into the beam of his light. Inside rests a cracked reliquary, its glass clouded with age.

JOE

This one's active. Look at the trails.

He sprays a thin line of pesticide along the stone lip. The liquid hisses against the cold surface. The Priest leans closer, white collar bright against his black robes, hands trembling.

THE PRIEST

Do you ever wonder what the insects remember?

JOE

I wonder how much overtime the Vatican's paying me.

They move to the next vault. The Priest's candle gutters. A low draft moans through the crypt like distant chanting. Joe shines his light deeper; something metallic flashes inside the stone.

JOE

Hand me the pry bar again. This lid's stuck.

The Priest passes it over without a word. Metal scrapes stone. The vault door swings open to reveal a small silver box wrapped in crimson silk. Fine dust motes dance in the shallow focus of Joe's flashlight.

THE PRIEST

That box belonged to a bishop who died screaming.

JOE

They all scream when the bill arrives.

Joe lifts the box carefully. Silverfish pour from its seams, their bodies catching the faint yellow candlelight like tiny mirrors. The Priest steps back, breath visible in the chilled air.

THE PRIEST

They're moving faster than before.

JOE

Then we spray faster. Hold the light steady.

The Priest's hand steadies just enough for the flame to illuminate Joe's gaunt face, ringed eyes focused on the task. Joe works the sprayer trigger in short bursts, the mist settling over the relics like a veil. The insects slow, then vanish into cracks in the ancient stone.

INT. CRYPT BELOW THE BASILICA - NIGHT

Joe moves through the stone vaults, his battered toolkit slung over one

shoulder, the pesticide sprayer gripped tight in gloved hands. Dim candlelight yellows flicker across aged stone grays and crimson accents carved into the walls. Thick incense hangs low, mixing with the metallic scent of damp earth. His grease-stained coveralls are streaked with mud, ringed eyes darting beneath the shallow focus of a handheld camera that sways with every step.

Shadows stretch and twist against the vaults, detaching from their sources. One elongates into a robed figure that slips behind a column before snapping back into place. Joe pauses, thumb pressing the sprayer's trigger. A fine mist hisses out, catching the faint light like silver threads.

JOE

Just silverfish. Nothing but bugs in the walls.

A vision flares in the corner of his eye: a bishop's hands, bloodied, pressing a relic into wet stone. The image dissolves into mist. Joe shakes his head, sprayer raised again. The mist swirls thicker now, carrying whispers that echo off the labyrinth walls.

Another shadow detaches, crawling upward like liquid across the vault ceiling. It pulses with thunderous night grays from the storm above. Joe tracks it with the beam of his headlamp, shallow depth blurring the edges until the shape resolves into a child's face, mouth open in silent scream, then gone.

JOE

(under his breath)

Memories. That's all they are.

He advances deeper, boots scraping stone. The sprayer hisses in rhythmic bursts, but the chemical cloud parts around certain alcoves, refusing to settle. Gilded relic cases half-buried in rubble catch the light, their surfaces rippling as if breathing. A low wind rushes through unseen cracks, carrying the scent of old incense and something metallic.

Joe stops before a vault door etched with ancient script. His gloved hand reaches out, fingers tracing the grooves. The shadows behind him converge into a single mass, humanoid now, arms outstretched. The camera tracks forward, handheld jitter amplifying the approach.

JOE

Show yourself, then. I've seen worse in confessionals.

The mass lunges. Joe spins, sprayer firing wildly. Mist fills the frame as the vision explodes: a cathedral spire cracking under lightning, a silverfish the size of a man skittering across marble. The image burns into the stone around him before fading. Joe stumbles back, breath ragged, coveralls soaked. The unnatural shadows retreat into corners, but one lingers, watching from the edge of the light.

INT. CRYPT BELOW THE BASILICA - NIGHT

The crypt yawns in aged stone grays, vaulted ceilings dripping with condensation. Dim candlelight yellows flicker against crimson tapestries and cracked gilded frames. Shadows pool like ink in every corner. A handheld camera tracks low through the narrow passage, shallow focus blurring the edges where something moves just out of sight.

Joe grips his pesticide sprayer tighter, gloved knuckles white. His grease-stained coveralls hang loose on his gaunt frame. Ringed eyes scan the labyrinth of stone vaults. The Priest stands a few steps ahead, pale face half-lit, black robes brushing the damp floor. His trembling hands clutch a silver reliquary etched with ancient symbols.

JOE

These bugs... they're not normal. They swarm the relics like they remember who owned 'em.

THE PRIEST

They do remember. Every last one.

The Priest's voice cracks, echoing off the vaults. Footsteps seem to answer from deeper in the dark-soft, skittering, multiplying. The air thickens with incense and something metallic.

JOE

What are you saying, Father? Silverfish don't have memories.

THE PRIEST

These relics once belonged to possessed souls. Martyrs, heretics, the ones the Church locked away before the devils took root. The silverfish feed on the residue. They carry the old voices.

A low rumble rolls through the stone. One of the relic cases rattles on its pedestal. Gilded gold catches a faint yellow flare, then dims. The Priest's hands shake harder; he steadies himself against the wall.

JOE

And now they're waking up. Because I sprayed the damn things.

THE PRIEST

You disturbed the vessels. They close in when the vessels are disturbed.

Something wet and heavy drags across the floor behind them. Joe spins, sprayer raised. The camera pushes forward into the gloom, catching brief glints of many small, silver bodies crawling along the vault seams. The Priest's eyes widen, breath fogging in the cold.

THE PRIEST

We cannot outrun them in here. The crypt remembers every soul it swallowed.

Joe backs toward the nearest archway, toolkit clinking against his hip. The skittering grows louder, surrounding, pressing from all sides. Candle flames gutter in unison. Deep shadowy blacks swallow the edges of the frame as the Priest clutches the reliquary to his chest.

INT. CRYPT BELOW THE BASILICA - NIGHT

Joe backs into a narrow vault, his battered toolkit clanging against damp stone. The gloved hand on his pesticide sprayer trembles under the weight of the canister. Dim candlelight yellows flicker from wall sconces, casting shallow focus on the aged stone grays that press close on every side.

Silverfish pour from a cracked reliquary above, their metallic bodies glinting in the mist. They multiply across the vault ceiling in a rippling wave, legs clicking like distant thunder. Joe swings the sprayer nozzle upward and depresses the trigger. A thin chemical mist hisses out, but the insects part around it, reforming thicker behind the spray.

He stumbles backward through the vault archway, boots splashing in shallow water pooled on the crypt floor. The swarm follows, spilling down the walls in sheets. Their bodies catch the faint candlelight, turning the deep shadowy blacks of the passage into a living, shifting mass. Joe's weary posture hunches lower as he shoulders through a tighter corridor, the stone scraping his grease-stained coveralls.

More silverfish emerge from side niches, their numbers doubling with every step he takes. They drop onto his shoulders and skitter across the sprayer hose. Joe swats at them with his free hand, the ringed eyes wide in the handheld sway of the camera tracking his retreat. He turns down another vault, the labyrinth narrowing until the walls nearly touch his elbows.

The insects close faster now, a crimson-tinged glint catching on their scales from some unseen source. Joe's breath fogs in the incense-heavy air. He drops the empty sprayer and breaks into a half-run, boots echoing off the vaults while the swarm surges forward in relentless pursuit.

INT. VATICAN ARCHIVES - NIGHT

Flickering candlelight yellows bleed across gilded relic cases, their gold leaf catching the dim glow like scattered embers. Deep shadows pool between aged stone columns. Handheld camera drifts low, shallow focus on mist curling from incense burners.

JOE pushes through the heavy oak door, grease-stained coveralls streaked with crypt dust. His ringed eyes scan the room, battered toolkit clanking at his side. He sets the pesticide sprayer down and kneels beside a row of crates, gloved hands sorting spare canisters and silver nitrate vials.

THE PRIEST kneels before an open reliquary, black robes pooling on the stone. His pale face tilts upward, lips moving in silent Latin. Trembling hands clutch a crimson stole.

JOE

They're stirring down there. Something's stirring them.

THE PRIEST

(without turning)

The relics remember. Do not disturb what sleeps inside them.

A low scraping echoes from the stairwell behind them. Joe freezes, one hand on a vial. The candle nearest the door gutters, casting his gaunt face into momentary black.

JOE

I need the pressurized rig. The one with the blessed salt mix. It's in the second crate.

He rises, boots scraping grit, and pops the lid. Metal tools clatter. The Priest's voice rises, steady but thin.

THE PRIEST

Dominus vobiscum. Et cum spiritu tuo.

Another scrape, closer now. Shadows along the far wall shift as if something tests the edges of the light. Joe pulls the rig free, straps it over his shoulder. His breath fogs in the cold air.

JOE

You hear that? Like claws on stone.

THE PRIEST

They follow the memories. The silverfish are only the beginning.

Joe glances toward the stairwell. A faint crimson glow pulses once from a cracked reliquary lid. He tightens his grip on the sprayer nozzle.

JOE

Then we seal the upper vents before they reach the nave. I've got three more charges.

He moves toward the exit, toolkit swinging. The Priest remains kneeling, but his eyes flick to the moving shadows. The incense thickens, curling like gray fingers around the gilded cases. A single candle dies with a soft hiss.

THE PRIEST

Go quickly. They already smell the living.

Joe pauses at the threshold, listening. Distant footsteps-too many, too light-climb the stairs below. He adjusts the sprayer and steps into the corridor without looking back. The remaining candles flicker in unison, throwing the Priest's pale face into deeper shadow.

INT. CRYPT BELOW THE BASILICA - NIGHT

Joe staggers through the stone labyrinth, his grease-stained coveralls soaked at the knees. The battered toolkit swings from his gloved fist. His pesticide sprayer dangles useless at his side. Candlelight gutters against the vaulted ceiling, throwing crimson streaks across gilded relic cases half-buried in shadow.

A single reliquary pulses on a low stone altar ahead, its gold filigree catching faint yellow light. Joe approaches. His ringed eyes narrow. The air thickens with incense and damp stone. He reaches out.

The lights die.

In the sudden black, a low moan rises from the walls themselves. Joe's body seizes. His back arches. The sprayer clatters to the floor.

The crypt warps. Stone dissolves into misted blue fog. Joe stands inside a torch-lit cell. Chains rattle. A robed figure-once a cardinal, face gaunt with hunger-writhes on the floor, silverfish pouring from his mouth and eyes. The insects chew through parchment skin, revealing bone that still remembers pain. The man's screams echo Joe's own throat.

Joe drops to his knees. His hands claw at empty air. The vision tightens. The cardinal's eyes lock on him, pleading. Thunder cracks somewhere above. Rain hisses on unseen domes. The silverfish multiply, crawling across Joe's coveralls, into his sleeves, across his neck.

He gasps, choking on the taste of old blood and myrrh. The cardinal's tormented voice leaks from Joe's own lips.

JOE

I carried their sins... I carried them
all...

The vision collapses inward. The crypt returns in stuttering frames-flickering lights, deep blacks, aged grays. Joe lies curled on the cold floor beside the reliquary. His gloved fingers twitch. Tears cut tracks through the grime on his face. The silverfish are gone. Only the weight of centuries remains, pressing down until breath feels stolen.

Joe stares at the ceiling vaults, eyes hollow. The All Is Lost has arrived.

INT. CRYPT BELOW THE BASILICA - NIGHT

Handheld camera drifts through the stone vaults, shallow focus blurring the edges where torchlight fails. Aged gray walls sweat moisture. Crimson tapestries hang in tatters, their gold threads catching faint yellow flickers that die before they reach the floor. Incense hangs thick, sweet and rotten.

Joe staggers forward, grease-stained coveralls soaked at the knees, pesticide sprayer dangling from one gloved hand. His ringed eyes stare into the deeper black ahead, where the vaults narrow into nothing. The battered toolkit clanks against his thigh with every step.

THE PRIEST

Joe. Joe, stop. The light won't reach you
there.

Joe does not turn. His breath comes ragged, fogging the cold air.

JOE

They remember. Every one of them. The bones
in the cases, the nails, the cloth. They
remember being alive and they want it back.

THE PRIEST

Come away from the dark. Please.

The Priest's trembling hands clutch at Joe's sleeve. His white collar glows like bone under the dying candlelight. Joe shrugs him off and takes another step. Shadows coil around his boots, moving against the flicker.

JOE

I sprayed the silverfish. They crawled out
of the relics anyway. Whispering. Every
relic has a voice.

A low groan echoes from the vaults ahead, wet and ancient. Joe's posture sags. The sprayer slips from his fingers and clatters on the stone.

THE PRIEST

Don't listen. Look at me.

Joe's knees buckle. He drops hard, palms slapping the wet floor. The Priest lunges, catching him under the arms, robes tangling. Joe's head lolls, eyes half-closed, mouth slack.

JOE

(whispering)

I can feel them under my skin.

THE PRIEST

Then fight it. The Lord does not abandon His servants in the crypt.

Joe convulses once, a short, violent shudder that rattles his toolkit. The Priest drags him backward across the stones, heels scraping, breath laboring. Candle flames bend sideways as if wind moves through sealed walls. The darkness behind them seems to press forward, hungry.

JOE

Let me go. Let them take what they want.

THE PRIEST

I will not.

The Priest's pale face is inches from Joe's, sweat beading on his brow. He pulls again, robes dragging dust and fragments of gilded leaf. Joe's body goes limp, dead weight against the Priest's chest. The only sound is the scrape of boots on stone and the faint, relentless drip of water somewhere deeper in the vaults.

INT. VATICAN ARCHIVES - NIGHT

Dim candlelight flickers across rows of gilded relic cases, casting crimson accents against aged stone grays and deep shadows. Thick incense hangs in the misty blue air, barely stirring. Joe stands alone amid the cases, his grease-stained coveralls damp with crypt sweat, ringed eyes fixed on the battered toolkit at his feet.

He grips the pesticide sprayer tighter, gloved fingers whitening. The weight feels useless now. A faint yellow glow pulses from a cracked reliquary ahead, silverfish skittering across its gold filigree like living memories.

JOE

(to himself)

Run. Like always. Spray and vanish.

He takes one step backward toward the heavy oak door. Thunder rumbles outside, shaking the dim lights. His weary posture sags further, shoulders curling under the coveralls. Then the reliquary whispers—a low, choral murmur of ancient voices bleeding through the stone.

Joe freezes. He lowers the sprayer slowly, the nozzle clinking against the marble floor. His gaunt face hardens under the flickering light, eyes narrowing on the case. He strips off one glove, exposing callused skin, and reaches forward.

JOE

(quiet, resolute)

No more running from what they remember.

His bare fingers press against the cold glass. The silverfish swarm toward his touch, then still. Shadows deepen around him, but Joe leans in, breathing the incense deeper, confronting the pulse of memory instead of fleeing. The sprayer lies discarded behind him as he steps closer into the gloom.

INT. CRYPT BELOW THE BASILICA - NIGHT

The stone vaults stretch into blackness, lit only by guttering candles that throw crimson streaks across aged gray walls. Mist curls low across the

floor, carrying the faint scent of incense and damp earth. Joe stands hunched over his battered toolkit, grease-stained coveralls smeared with dust, gloved hands twisting the nozzle on his pesticide sprayer. The Priest lingers a step behind, black robes whispering against stone, white collar stark against his pale throat, fingers trembling as he clutches a silver flask.

JOE

This stuff's all we got left. Mix it slow.

THE PRIEST

The water was blessed at dawn. It should bind to whatever lingers in the silverfish.

Joe unscrews the sprayer cap. He pours the holy water in a careful stream, the liquid catching faint candlelight yellow as it swirls into the tank. A low hiss escapes the seals. Shadows shift along the vaulted ceiling like living things.

JOE

(rubbing his ringed eyes)

My old man used to say poison's just memory in a bottle. These things remember too much.

THE PRIEST

Then we give them something older to fear.

The Priest steps closer, hands shaking as he uncorks a second vial. Crimson accents glint from a nearby reliquary niche. He tilts the vial, letting thick oil thread into the mixture. Joe watches the liquid darken, then snaps the cap shut with a gloved palm.

JOE

You sure about this last push? Place feels like it's breathing.

THE PRIEST

The entities below the silver have already begun to surface. We either finish it here or watch the relics walk.

Joe shoulders the sprayer, straps biting into his weary frame. He checks the pressure gauge by the flickering light, the needle quivering in the shallow focus of one dying candle. The Priest draws a small crucifix from his robes, pressing it against the flask before tucking it away.

JOE

Stay behind me on the turns. These things don't like the light or the spray.

THE PRIEST

I will anoint the thresholds as we go. The final vault is three chambers ahead.

Joe nods once, the motion slow and heavy. He tests the trigger; a fine mist hisses out, catching the air like silver threads. The Priest's breath clouds in the cold, his pale face half-lost in the nearest shadow. They move forward together, boots scraping stone, the sprayer's weight pulling Joe's posture lower as the darkness thickens ahead.

INT. CRYPT BELOW THE BASILICA - NIGHT

The crypt stretches in handheld shallow focus, stone vaults slick with condensation under dim candlelight yellows that fight misty blue shadows. Aged grays press in from every wall. Silverfish pour from cracked relic cases like liquid mercury, their bodies catching faint gilded glints before they swell and twist.

JOE

Sprayer raised, coveralls streaked with grease and crypt dust, eyes ringed from nights without sleep.

JOE

They're feeding on the relics again. Stay behind me.

THE PRIEST

Trembling hands clutch a rosary, white collar stark against black robes in the flickering light.

THE PRIEST

The silverfish are not insects. They are the memories wearing skin.

Silverfish erupt upward in a writhing column. One mass hardens into the translucent figure of a 12th-century cardinal, crimson accents bleeding through its robes, mouth open in a silent scream. The figure lunges. Joe triggers the sprayer; pesticide mist hisses across stone and spirit alike. The cardinal dissolves into thousands of wriggling bodies that scatter across vault floors.

JOE

That one remembered Latin. I could hear it.

Another swarm coalesces into a martyred nun, pale face mirroring the priest's own terror, hands raised as if holding a lost relic. Her form flickers under the handheld lens, edges fraying like torn film.

THE PRIEST

Do not let them touch the cases. Their touch wakes the others.

Joe advances, toolkit clanking, boots crunching silverfish shells that pop like wet glass. The nun's figure reaches for him; he swings the sprayer nozzle like a club and the form bursts into a rain of insects that patter against his face. The priest stumbles, robes dragging through the writhing carpet.

THE PRIEST

Joe, the vault at the end. The oldest relic. That is where they are strongest.

A deeper rumble shakes the crypt. The remaining silverfish rush toward a gilded reliquary at the far end, their bodies knitting into a towering, half-formed saint whose eyes glow with candlelight yellow. The saint's mouth opens and a chorus of forgotten voices leaks out, low and wet.

JOE

Then we end it there. No more memories
walking.

Joe and the priest move forward together through the shallow-focus dark, pesticide mist and incense smoke curling around them like living fog. Silverfish skitter up their legs and dissolve under boot and spray. The saint's form leans down, fingers of silverfish reaching for the priest's collar.

THE PRIEST

In the name of every soul trapped here-

The priest flings holy water from a vial. Droplets sizzle on impact. Joe empties the last of the tank in a long, steady arc. The saint's body collapses inward, silverfish raining back to the stone floor in a dying tide. The final few skitter into cracks and vanish.

Only the sound of dripping water and two men breathing remains. Joe lowers the empty sprayer. The priest's hands have stopped trembling.

INT. VATICAN ARCHIVES - NIGHT

A gaunt man in grease-stained coveralls moves through the dim vault, ringed eyes scanning gilded relic cases under faint candlelight yellows that bleed into deep shadowy blacks. Aged stone grays press close on every side. Joe carries his battered toolkit in one gloved hand and the pesticide sprayer in the other, the metal canister slick with condensation. Incense hangs thick, curling like mist through the shallow-focus pools of light.

He stops before the final open case. Crimson religious accents glint along its edges, a faint silverfish carcass twitching on the velvet lining. Joe sets the toolkit down with a soft metallic clink. His weary posture bends forward, hands steady despite the tremor in his shoulders. He lifts the sprayer nozzle and releases a fine mist that catches the flickering light like dust motes in a cathedral nave.

The case lid creaks as he raises it. Shadows shift across the stone floor, handheld tracking the slow descent of the heavy wood. Joe presses the lid shut, the sound echoing once through the silent rows of relics. He slides a rusted latch into place, gloved fingers testing the lock twice.

A low wind rattles the high windows. Thunder grumbles beyond the walls, casting brief gray flashes across the gilded surfaces. Joe wipes his brow with the back of one glove, leaving a faint streak of residue. He steps back, sprayer lowered, surveying the sealed row. The last case sits motionless under the dying candle glow.

Joe exhales, shoulders slumping further. He shoulders the toolkit and turns, boots scraping stone as he walks the length of the archive toward the exit arch. The sprayer swings at his side, empty now. Flickering lights catch the edges of his coveralls, then fade behind him as he passes into deeper shadow.

EXT. ANCIENT SPIRES OF THE VATICAN - DAWN

Rain-slicked stone stretches across the ancient spires, water still dripping from the edges of illuminated domes. Thunderous night grays fade into misty blues as the first pale light creeps over the horizon. A battered toolkit rests against a weathered gargoyle, its metal latch open and glinting with faint gold from the rising sun.

JOE stands at the ledge, gaunt and weary, his ringed eyes fixed on the

breaking dawn. Grease stains darken his coveralls at the knees and elbows. His gloved hands rest on the pesticide sprayer, barrel pointed downward, nozzle still damp from the crypt. Wind tugs at his collar, carrying the last trace of incense from below.

He shifts his weight, boots scraping stone. A single crimson thread from a torn relic cloth clings to his sleeve, fluttering once before the breeze pulls it free. It drops into the shadows between spires.

Joe watches the light touch the nearest dome, revealing the curve of aged stone and the faint outline of a cross against the sky. His shoulders slump further. The sprayer slips from his fingers and clatters once on the wet ledge before settling.

He reaches into his pocket, pulls out a small silverfish carcass pinched between thumb and forefinger, then lets it fall. It vanishes into the rain gutter. Below, the basilica roofs emerge from darkness, gilded edges catching the first yellow glow.

Joe remains still, breath visible in the cool air, eyes half-closed against the light. The handheld frame holds on his profile as the sun climbs higher, washing the spires in pale blue and gray.