

Collapse 90

Chapter 90: Goodbye Mediterranean Sea_1

It was clear that a hospital map definitely existed within this forbidden zone.

However, Gu Mian and his companion had rushed in unprepared, leading to their current predicament.

If only I'd found the hospital map before stepping into this hellhole, Gu Mian muttered, frantically looking around as he ran.

He tried to find something on the staircase walls, but reality often fell short of expectations. The walls were squeaky clean, bearing only some dried bloodstains and gruesome, bloody handprints.

Gu Mian didn't expect to discover anything from these handprints; he just kept running upwards relentlessly.

At that moment, Chu Changge, who was following behind, suddenly spoke up. "Have you noticed the doors at every staircase landing?"

Of course, I have, Gu Mian thought.

He replied, "What are you suggesting?"

Then, Chu Changge offered an answer Gu Mian had expected. "We split up. One person continues running upwards to draw their attention; the other rushes into the corridor to lock the door from the inside. If we're lucky, those things behind us might only chase the one still going up the stairs. The person in the corridor could then move freely..."

If he could move freely, he could look for the map and find clues about the main quest: Jin Hu, Gu Mian considered.

He interrupted Chu Changge, "Are you talking to me about luck?"

"That's why this plan needs the right person for the right job."

Since it had come to this, Gu Mian understood. "So I keep running upwards, and you get to move freely?"

"Exactly."

Hearing this, Gu Mian hesitated for a moment. "What if some of those things split off to chase you too?"

Chu Changge shook his head. "You have to trust your own luck."

Gu Mian was speechless. "..."

They were currently on the stairs between the eighth and ninth floors. Wasting no time, they split up upon reaching the ninth floor.

"Once you lose those things, let's regroup on the thirteenth floor." That was the last thing Chu Changge said before slamming the door.

The moment his voice faded, BANG! The door to the ninth-floor landing slammed shut. Immediately after, Gu Mian heard the distinct sound of a latch sliding into place from behind it.

The light overhead flickered a few more times, but Gu Mian didn't pause, continuing his ascent.

The bloody handprints persisted on the walls. On the ninth-floor staircase wall, nail scratches now appeared alongside the handprints.

Under the flickering light, Gu Mian saw several deep gouges scraped into the wall, nail marks that extended all the way to the bend in the staircase ahead.

It looks as if someone was forcefully dragged up here, he thought. Judging by these marks, they must have put up a hell of a struggle.

Gu Mian followed the scratches upwards, the monsters still hot on his heels.

He wasn't sure if any of them had broken off to pursue Chu Changge. He didn't have the luxury of stopping to count how many fewer things were chasing him now. All he could do was keep running upwards without a backward glance.

Once I find a proper weapon... Gu Mian fumed, glaring at the chair leg clutched in his hand.

If only this weapon was even slightly better, I wouldn't have been chased this far, he thought.

Just as Gu Mian was preoccupied with thoughts of a better weapon, the scene before him snapped him back to reality.

This was the twelfth floor. Gu Mian noticed that the door to this stairwell landing was different from those on the lower floors.

A device resembling a card reader was fixed tightly to the door, identical to the one at the hospital's main entrance.

At the same time, Gu Mian saw that the scratches on the stairwell wall ended abruptly here.

Then again, 'abruptly ended' might not be the right way to put it, Gu Mian mused. He could see the terrifying gouges extending right up to the side of this door before vanishing, as if whatever made them had been dragged through it.

He quickly glanced at the stairs leading to the floor above.

They appeared noticeably cleaner, as if this twelfth floor served as some kind of dividing line.

Gu Mian quickly reached the twelfth-floor landing door. "This damn hospital has a surprising number of places requiring a card swipe," he grumbled. "Maybe when I get back, our hospital should implement a card system too. Only doctors get in..."

The things chasing him were still close behind, so he didn't waste time. Without even removing the ID badge from his coat, he pressed his chest against the card reader.

BEEP. The card reader sounded, and the landing door slowly creaked open a crack.

As he barged in, Gu Mian muttered to himself, "Seems like something has been dragging all the living people in this hospital to this floor. Maybe I'll run into another player or two in here? Then again, are there even any players left alive in this hellhole?"

The doors in this hospital were quite advanced. As soon as Gu Mian slipped inside, the door began to close behind him.

In the instant before it shut completely, he saw through the narrowing gap that the white-clad things had reached the landing. However, they seemed to recoil at the sight of the door, hesitating and then stopping.

Gu Mian stared back at them through the shrinking crack, but not for long, as the door sealed itself shut.

Only then did he turn to examine the twelfth floor.

The first thing he saw was a corridor. This hospital's layout differed from his own; there appeared to be a few offices in the center, flanked by patient rooms on either side.

The doors to all the patient rooms were wide open. Gu Mian saw they were all empty, completely devoid of people.

This area was impeccably clean, a stark contrast to the dingy stairwells he had just traversed.

It was as if a dedicated cleaning crew constantly maintained this floor. The ground was spotless, and the overhead lights shone brightly, illuminating fluorescent tubes that seemed free of even a single speck of dust.

This is really strange... Gu Mian thought. He had seen the gouges outside the door and had braced himself for a scene from hell. To his surprise, this area seemed rather peaceful.

He scrutinized the pristine corridor for a few moments.

There were no people in sight; it seemed he was utterly alone.

The only places of interest now were those few locked offices. Gu Mian headed towards the offices in the middle of the corridor, but after only a few steps, he heard an odd sound.

The sound was muffled, like something rustling or flapping, and it came from one of the offices.

A living person?

Gu Mian paused for a moment before continuing forward.

When he reached the entrance of one particular office, he noticed a large plaque mounted on the adjacent wall.

It was covered in photographs, resembling a school's honor roll displaying pictures of top-ranking students. Everyone in the photos was in the prime of their youth, depicted as the finest flowers carefully nurtured by the motherland.

However, this "honor roll" was quite different from those Gu Mian remembered from his school days.

Several individuals on this board were bald; their shiny pates reflected the overhead lights. Gu Mian could even trace the distinct pattern of a receding hairline, like the Mediterranean coastline, on one of them.

This clearly wasn't an honor roll but a hospital staff roster. After all, students weren't typically this bald.

A large line of text at the top of the plaque read: "Respiratory Department Physicians."

Gu Mian's gaze traveled further down the board.

He focused on the photo of one particularly prominent individual: "Director of the Respiratory Department, Jin Hu..."