The London Museum stood at the very hub of Tier Two, in a busy distric called Bloomsbury, and the underbelly of Tier One hung like a rusty sky a few feet above the rooftops. Tom didn’t worry about being spotted as he pushed his way along the dark, crowded street towards the public Goggle-screen outside the Tottenham Court Road elevator station. Joining the crowd in front of it he had his first glimpse of the distant prey; a watery, blue-grey blur captured by cameras down on Tier Six.

“The town is called Salthook,” boomed the voice of the announcer. “A mining platform of nine hundred inhabitants. She is currently heading due East, but the Guild of Navigators predicts London will catch her before sundown. There are sure to be many more towns awaiting us beyond the land-bridge; clear proof of just how wise our beloved Lord Mayor was when he decided to bring London East again…”

 Tom had never felt his city move at such an astonishing speed and he longed to be down at the observation deck, feeling the wind on his face. He was probably already in trouble with Mr Pomeroy. What difference could it make if he stole a few more minutes?

 He set off at a run and soon reached Bloomsbury Park, out in the open air on the tier’s brim. It had been a proper park once, with trees and duck-ponds, but because of the recent shortage of prey it had been given over to food production and its lawns grubbed up to make way for cabbage-plots and algae-pans. The observation platforms were all still there though, raised balconies jutting out from the edge of the tier where Londoners could go to watch the passing view. Tom hurried towards the nearest. An even bigger crowd had gathered there, including quite a few people in the black of the Historians’ Guild, and Tom tried to look inconspicuous as he pushed his way through to the front and peered over the railings. Salthook was only five miles ahead, travelling flat out with black smoke spewing from its exhaust stacks.

 “Natsworthy!” called a braying voice, and his heart sank. He looked round and found that he was standing next to Melliphant, a burly First Class Apprentice, who grinned at him and said, “Isn’t it wonderful? A fat, little salt-mining platform, with C20 land engines! Just what London needs!”

 Herbert Melliphant was the worst sort of bully; the sort who didn’t just hit you and stick your head down the lavatory, but made it his business to find out all your secrets and the things that upset you most and taunt you with them. He enjoyed picking on Tom, who was small and shy and had no friends to stick up for him – and Tom could not get back at him because Melliphant’s family had paid to make him a First Class Apprentice, while Tom, who had no family, was a mere Third. He knew Melliphant was only bothering to talk to him because he was hoping to impress a pretty young Historian named Clytie Potts, who was standing just behind. Tom nodded and turned his back, concentrating on the chase.

 “Look!” shouted Clytie Potts.

 The gap between London and its prey was narrowing fast and a dark shape had lifted clear of Salthook. Soon there was another and another. Airships! The crowds on London’s observation platforms cheered.