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## Rotwang the Inventor

Fritz Lang's classic film *Metropolis* was released in Berlin in January 1927. Computers existed only as primitive Hollerith cards, but electricity, automobiles, airplanes, and telephones had entered the scene by the time Lang created the first science fiction movie. Lang's film presents an extraordinary and prescient vision of the seductive appeal and sheer beauty of technology, along with the potentially dehumanizing effects on those who are slaves to its operation and those who would claim to be its masters. Though the movie's plot and characters are idealized and simplistic, the complex and beautifully composed images of Lang's future world are unforgettable. The film's themes form a backdrop for our reflections on people and technology. [1](#)

Here is the city of Metropolis in the twenty-first century. Above ground, the city's immense buildings create breathtaking patterns of light, shadow, and geometric form. Crowded roadways are suspended high above the ground, crisscrossing the vast spaces between buildings. The cityscape is visually stunning, built by human hands on a scale that transcends ordinary human activities.

Whose hands? Not those of the masters of Metropolis—the masters provide only the minds that direct the city from above. The hands belong to the people who live and work in the depths below ground, slaves to the machines that run the city. We first see the workers through the eyes of the film's hero, the son of one of the masters, who is curious to see what life is like for his brothers and sisters underground.