



pathos and pharmaceutical-grade testosterone to his role as Randy "The Ram."

**16 PARANOID PARK** *Gus Van Sant*

A stylistic masterpiece, *Paranoid Park* is one part Spike Jonze, one part Wong Kar-wai and one part something only Gus Van Sant himself could've imagined. But while the film is unmistakably gorgeous, it's Gabe Nevins' untrained lead performance that makes this haunting tale of lost innocence unforgettable.

**15 KABLUEY** *Scott Prendergast*

One of the best-looking comedies in years, Scott Prendergast's semi-autobiographical *Kabluey* is an audacious first feature that sends up the war in Iraq by way of suburbia. Its odd mixture of slapstick and melancholy is unlike anything else we've seen.

**14 RACHEL GETTING MARRIED** *Jonathan Demme*

Demme shot the electric family gatherings in *Rachel Getting Married* like a fascinated documentarian, huddling in the corner to watch every sweet or hurtful moment. It's like a Noah Baumbach film but with a heart, a soul and a stellar ensemble cast, anchored by Anne Hathaway's fierce, quivering performance.

**13 VICKY CRISTINA BARCELONA**

*Woody Allen* Woody Allen's lusty travelogue is one of his finest films. Anchored by a captivating cast, it explodes upon the arrival of Penélope Cruz, radiating passion. For such brisk entertainment, Vicky ends on an

ambiguous but poignant note, a final gracenote from a director who's back in top form.

**12 MAN ON WIRE** *James Marsh*

Reducing the most daring artistic crime in modern history—Frenchman Philippe Petit's wire walk between the World Trade Center towers—to a three-word film title illustrates the minimalist purity of this gripping documentary.

**11 CALL+RESPONSE** *Justin Dillon*

Music from Matisyahu, Talib Kweli and Cold War Kids—along with the poetic musings of Dr. Cornel West—keeps this documentary about the estimated 27 million people living in slavery from leaving you paralyzed with depression. Dillon has created what may be the year's most important film.

**20 IRON MAN** *Directed by Jon Favreau*

While the film's explosive, high-flying action scenes struggle to catch fire on the small screen, Robert Downey Jr.'s fantastic, humanizing performance means you won't just be waiting for him to put on the suit and blow shit up.



**19 CHOP SHOP** *Ramin Bahrani*

Reminiscent of the Dardenne brothers' neo-realistic films, *Chop Shop* follows two orphaned siblings living in an auto-repair scrap yard in outermost Queens, who dream of making a better life for themselves. It's a heartbreaking story of disappointment and hope at the intersection of two worlds.

**18 THE POOL** *Chris Smith*

Indie director Smith has a knack for edgy, comical documentaries about culture jammers (*The Yes Men*) and low-budget horror auteurs (*American Movie*), but *The Pool* is a literal jump into the deep end. This understated gem—about a poor young man's dreams and a wealthy older man's bottled sorrow—aspires to literary epiphany (in Hindi, no less) that transcends class and language barriers.

**17 THE WRESTLER** *Darren Aronofsky*

This gritty portrait of a former pro-wrestling star is not only a surprising blast of realism from the auteur who made *The Fountain* but also a stunning comeback for Mickey Rourke, who brings humor,



BALLAST

**10 BALLAST** *Lance Hammer*

Mississippi in cool blue winter light. Three souls hanging in the balance. The flat infinity of the Delta landscape. And a parable about the mystery of compassion. Soulful and breathtaking, Lance Hammer's brave debut is a testament to the lowly wise.



RACHEL GETTING MARRIED