



Strange Beasts

James Audubon on crack is the best way to describe the uncanny works of animal painter Walton Ford. While his creatures are meticulously rendered in a naturalistic 19th-century manner, the scenes are surprisingly surreal. Often portrayed in predatory situations, the anthropomorphic birds and beasts enact naughty, Darwinian dramas that also implicate humans in the process. *Pancha Tantra* (Taschen, \$70) takes its title from an ancient Indian collection of animal tales similar to *Aesop's Fables*. Likewise, there seem to be cautionary messages inherent in Ford's sometimes humorous, sometimes disturbing, but always mesmerizing modern-day bestiary.