

# Multi-Tool Madness

By Jason West



## 1 GERBER SUSPENSION

**Pros:** Gerber reliability; one-handed usability of straight and serrated blade; internal spring mechanism on pliers; open design reduces sand or dirt getting caught in tool; our choice in the “fold-up” designs  
**Cons:** External lock releases can make grip uncomfortable without gloves

## 2 LEATHERMAN KICK

**Pros:** Tried and true; it’s a Leatherman, so you know it’s going to last  
**Cons:** Virtually impossible to use one-handed; despite “Zytel” grip covers, it’s still uncomfortable to use pliers without gloves

## 3 BUCK X-TRACT

**Pros:** Complete one-hand usability; comfortable to grip; full-sized knife blade  
**Cons:** Anemic pliers are good for manipulating but not for torquing or cutting

## 4 CRKT ZILLA-TOOL

**Pros:** One-handed use of pliers and blade; most comfortable grip  
**Cons:** A bit too long to be comfortable in a pocket

## 5 CRKT GUPPIE

**Pros:** Cheap; flashlight; compact size; carabineer design; it’s just cool—look at it, you know you want one!

**Cons:** No wire cutters; no needle nose; magnet that holds in screw bits is weak

## 6 GERBER MULTI-PLIER 600

**Pros:** Comfortable to grip; easy-to-use snap-lock pliers; incredibly solid  
**Cons:** Sand can cause the pliers’ locks to jam or slip; expensive; deploying knife is a pain

## 7 WINCHESTER WINSHOT

**Pros:** Cheap but functional; open design reduces sand or dirt getting caught in tool  
**Cons:** Exposed spring on pliers won’t last long; grip uncomfortable without gloves; non-locking tools

Nothing makes me feel more “Johnny on the Spot” than whipping out a multi-tool at just the right moment.

“What’s that you say? You’ve got a piece of brass jammed up in the chamber? And you need to tighten the scope down? Here, let me help!”

What can I say? I was a boy scout and the whole “be prepared” thing sank in pretty deeply. Of course, when I’m around Soldiers, it seems pretty rare that everyone isn’t packing some nifty piece of all-in-one hardware and willing to argue that theirs is the one to have. So, naturally we decided to put a bunch of them to the test.

There are dozens of brands and hundreds of different configurations, so we needed some way to narrow the field. In our experience, when we, or the Soldiers we’ve been around, reach for their multi-tool, 99 percent of the time they are going to use the pliers,

blade or screwdrivers. The little file or nifty pair of scissors might see use once in a great while, but for the most part they just seem to be taking up space and adding weight.

So, we decided to qualify for this competition each tool had to offer pliers, at least one blade and both Phillips and flat-head screwdrivers. Some of this month’s contestants offer significantly more options, so if you just don’t feel prepared unless you’re packing an awl, saw blade and tweezers, then you’ll want to give those models more consideration. The tools we chose to review were the CRKT Guppie, CRKT Zilla-Tool, Gerber Suspension, Gerber Multi-Plier 600, Winchester Winshot, Buck X-Tract and Leatherman Kick.

A few general thoughts before we get to the specifics of each tool. First, just say “no” to non-locking blades and tools. If you’re going to be using your multi-tool in the field, then you’re going to be turning, twisting and

squeezing the heck out of it. The last thing you need is to bang up your knuckles or pick up a deep gash when your unlocked blade folds on you.

Second, when shopping for a multi-tool, go somewhere that you can actually handle the items. Our reviewers had very different experiences with these tools based on how they fit their hand. Women should be particularly aware given that most of these items are scaled for man-size mitts.

Finally, don’t be mesmerized by useless features. We’re major gadget geeks (shocker, huh?) and we were hard-pressed to resist the siren song of the 8,000 attachment version of these tools, but we did. Price and weight sky rocket with every additional widget, and I mean, be honest, how often are you really going to use that magnifying glass attachment?

	ZILLA-TOOL	GUPPIE	WINSHOT	SUSPENSION	MP 600	X-TRACT	KICK
Cost	\$30	\$20	\$15	\$30	\$65	\$35	\$25
Weight	7.9 oz	5.3 oz	9.1 oz	9.0 oz	7.9 oz	6.3 oz	5.4 oz
Locking tools?	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No*
One-hand use of pliers?	Easy	Easy	Awkward	Awkward	Easy	Easy	Awkward
One-hand use of blade?	Easy	Easy	No	Easy	No	Easy	No
Cut bailing wire?	Easy	No	Easy	Easy	Easy	Awkward	Easy
Largest bolt it can turn	1/2in +	3/8in	1/2in	1/2in	1/2in +	3/8in	1/2in +

\*Higher end Leathermans offer locking blades



## VERDICT

### GX picks ZillaTool—we loved the full-sized blade and the comfortable grip.

We were fortunate enough to have some previously deployed Soldiers in the office on one of our testing days, so we were able to get their thoughts. Several of the crew really liked the Guppie. The carabineer design in particular met with approving sounds.

When we asked what else they liked about it, there were some pensive looks. Finally one of the sergeants rolled his shoulders and admitted, “Um... it’s just cool.” When we told them the cost, two corporals and a staff sergeant chimed in, “Oh yeah, I gotta get one of those.” However, after some initial oohing and aahing over the newer designs, they pretty much all came around to the tried and true Gerber 600. Why? The L-T said, “It’s reliable.” The Sarge again, “It’s solid.” Well, it’s pretty pricey doncha think? A near chorus of: “You get what you pay for.”

While we really can’t argue against any of their points, we settled on a different favorite: the CRKT Zilla-Tool. We loved the full-sized blade and the comfortable grip. Although the pliers don’t appear as robust as the Gerber, in our testing they were just as effective. As for its size, we felt that the ease of use was a fair trade for increased length.

Given the competitiveness we’ve seen in the field over “who has the better multi-tool,” we are fully prepared for the hate mail that will no doubt flood our inbox on this topic. Just to be clear, we’re not disrespecting any of the competitors. Gerber and Leatherman make excellent products. It was close, but we’ll stand by our call, so send your flames to: [BrothersWest@gxonline.com](mailto:BrothersWest@gxonline.com). Go ahead and brag on your Gerber or Leatherman, we and the Zilla-Tool will take on all comers. **GX**

# Books That Make You Go “Hooah!”

By Jason West

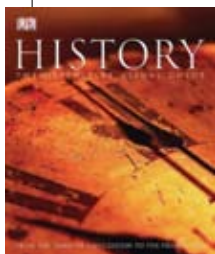
On a totally different note, here are some cool books and even cooler publishers. We regularly receive books sent to us to review. Most of these end up in our “I wish we had the time” pile. However, there are two publishers whose books are immediately opened, poured over and then seem to mysteriously disappear from the office, to be later spotted on someone’s coffee table at home. These two publishing champs are DK and Osprey.

## DK PUBLISHING

Packages from DK always bring ugly looks from the mailman. Their books are almost invariably monstrous tomes stuffed with a broad range of information and gorgeous photos. Here are the last two books we received:

### *History: The Definitive Visual Guide* (\$50)

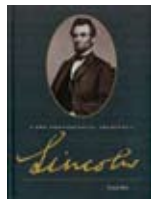
It’s a bold title and an even bolder work. Beginning at 4.5 million years ago and extending through events from earlier this year, this huge book covers virtually every major development in human history. Every page is full of colorful photos, graphs and charts along with easily digested, interesting chunks of copy. We loved that the book is organized by timeline rather than culture, because it allowed us to see the parallels and contrasts between the development of different cultures.



### *Lincoln: The Presidential Archives* (\$40)

Now THIS is a cool book. While not a full-blown biography of President Abraham

Lincoln, this book makes his life accessible in a unique way. In small pockets scattered through the text, you will find reproductions of documents from throughout Lincoln’s life. Letters, telegraphs, campaign banners, Lincoln’s hand-written draft of the Emancipation Proclamation and even a poster advertising the play where Lincoln was assassinated are beautifully recreated. Being able to touch history in this way creates a personal connection with this remarkable man.



## OSPREY PUBLISHING

At the far end of the “book size” spectrum from DK is Osprey. We first became enamored with the incredible detail and depth of information provided by Osprey books when we used to make and paint models of military machines. Today they provide us with always reliable, “no one gets it more precise” research resources. The best thing about reading one of these focused works is how often we find ourselves shaking our heads and saying, “Wow, I had no idea.”

### *World War II Combat Reconnaissance Tactics* (\$18)

If you didn’t think there could be an entire book on this topic, then you obviously don’t know Osprey. This book details both Allied and Axis methods and equipment used to locate and gather information on the enemy. Filled with photos and colorful diagrams, this work, like all Osprey books, makes even the most esoteric topic accessible to a casual reader.



### *332nd Fighter Group – Tuskegee Airmen* (\$23)

The history of this elite African-American flying unit is detailed with its focus primarily on their remarkable combat achievements. By the end of the war, the 332nd had destroyed 111 enemy aircraft, claimed 150 strafing victories and sunken German Naval vessel, and most impressively, they had not lost a single bomber under escort to enemy air attack (no other WWII fighter group could make this claim). **GX**



## “Halo 3”: Great Weapons, Not Enough Action

By SGT Alexander Purdue

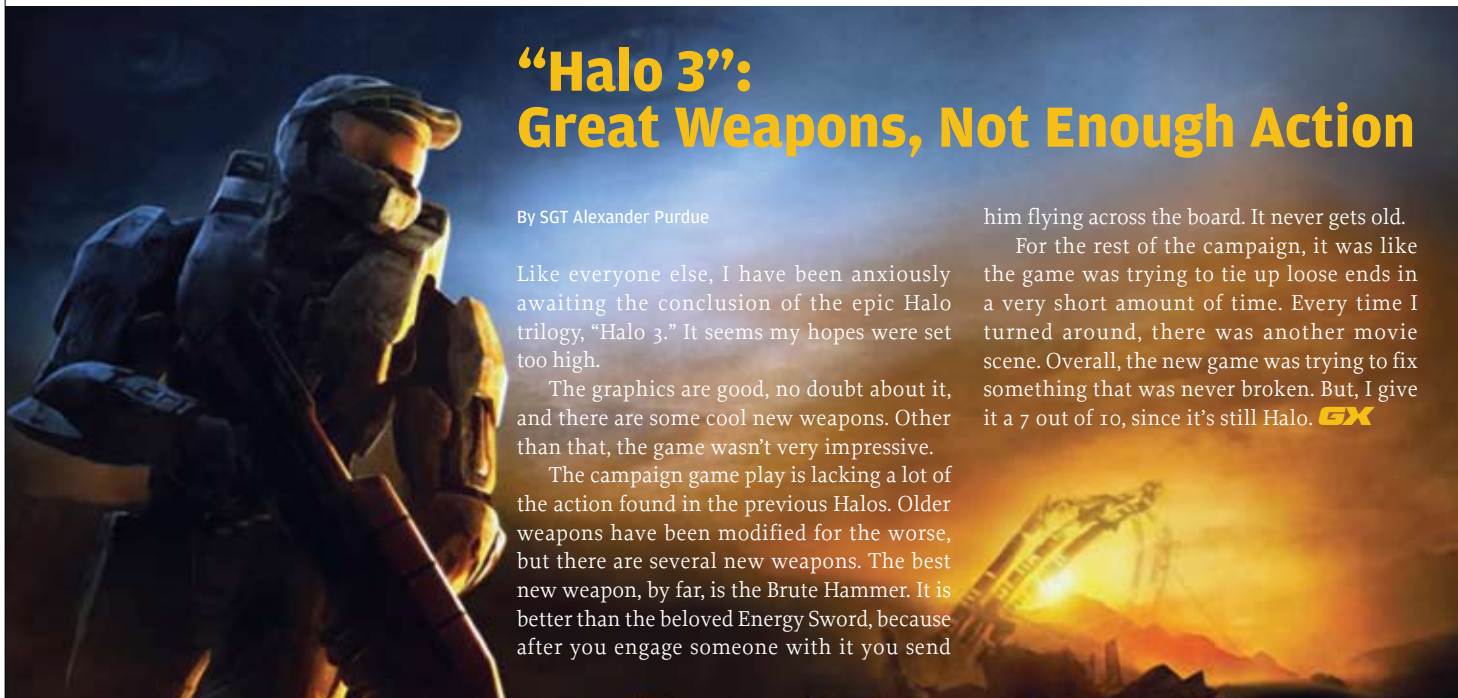
Like everyone else, I have been anxiously awaiting the conclusion of the epic Halo trilogy, “Halo 3.” It seems my hopes were set too high.

The graphics are good, no doubt about it, and there are some cool new weapons. Other than that, the game wasn’t very impressive.

The campaign game play is lacking a lot of the action found in the previous Halos. Older weapons have been modified for the worse, but there are several new weapons. The best new weapon, by far, is the Brute Hammer. It is better than the beloved Energy Sword, because after you engage someone with it you send

him flying across the board. It never gets old.

For the rest of the campaign, it was like the game was trying to tie up loose ends in a very short amount of time. Every time I turned around, there was another movie scene. Overall, the new game was trying to fix something that was never broken. But, I give it a 7 out of 10, since it’s still Halo. **GX**



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