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THE $1,500 HIGH-END GAMING PC BUILD ⊙

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The $1,500 High-End Gaming Computer Build

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This build is meant for the PC gamer who wants it all - serious high-resolution performance, a fast SSD, a cool-running case, and a power supply with wattage to spare. If you have simpler tastes, check out the $1,000 build, or jump to the $2,000 build for the premium experience!

After last month's major revisions, which included a step up to the GTX 780 video card, we move in another direction this month, taking advantage of a huge price drop on the Radeon R9 290. There's just no getting around the awesome bang for the buck it provides in the high-end gaming arena. Of course, we go with a custom-designed model, in this case from XFX. The system is anchored by an Intel i5-4670K with a big air cooler to allow for serious overclocks. If you're after the ultimate gaming rig under $1,500, this is the system for you!

We use Amazon's real-time pricing engine to give you the most up-to-date prices available, and we've recently added links to Amazon Canada and Amazon UK (with substitutions where necessary marked with an *). For special short-term promotions from other vendors, feel free to check our Hot Deals Blog. And browse our Monitor Buyer's Guide if a new monitor is also on your wish list.

We update this build monthly, as prices and components in this market change quite frequently, and a few dollars here or there could buy you (or cost you) a lot of performance! To see our past builds and prices, just flip over to the $1,500 High-End Gaming PC Archive page. If you need help building your system, check out our detailed Builder's Guide, or post a question in our new User Forum - we'll be sure to answer!

The April 2014 Build

Processor: **Intel Core i5-4670K**

Intel Core i5-4670K...
$229.99 Prime
Shop now
Amazon UK
Amazon Canada

The Core i5-4670K is a great bargain for gamers, as it performs extremely well even at its stock speed, yet has a good amount of overclocking headroom. A speed of at least 4.2GHz should be attainable using the powerful cooler recommended in this guide. The 4670K fluctuates in price between $220 and $240 - try to catch it closer to the lower end of that range if you can!

The Guru's Tip: In our recent in-depth article CPU Bottlenecking in Games, we found that the more expensive 4770K's Hyperthreading rarely provides higher performance, and sometimes actually lowers game performance!

Motherboard: **Asus Z87-A**

Asus Z87-A DDR3 1600...
$139.99 Prime
Shop now
Amazon UK*
Amazon Canada

This excellent midrange Z87 motherboard is an all-around winner, delivering quality components, the reliability that Asus is known for, and a UEFI interface that allows plenty of tweaking. It also features two full-speed PCIe 3.0 x8 slots for dual graphics cards, should you feel the need to add a second card at some point. We think that extra feature is worth paying for in a gaming system of this caliber.

The Guru's Tip: We also recommend the MSI Z87-G45 Gaming, which features upgraded audio and networking chipsets, along with sleek styling, at a slightly higher price.

Video Card: **XFX Radeon R9 290 4GB**

XFX Double D R9 290...
$469.49 Prime
Shop now
Amazon UK
Amazon Canada*

Finally, after months of inflated prices, the R9 290's price has dropped, and the XFX R9 290 Black Edition is one of the best picks. Its cooler is custom-designed to keep the hot-running R9 290 core well under the throttle limit of 95 degrees Celsius, at which point clock speeds are significantly reduced. This was an issue for the original reference design, but not for the XFX.

The Guru's Tip: Looking for a GeForce card? Then go for the EVGA GeForce GTX 780 SC 3GB, which performs very similarly to the R9 290 Black Edition out of the box. It was the previous pick for this build, before the R9 290 dropped in price.

Memory: **Crucial 2x4GB DDR3-1600**

Crucial Ballistix Sport 8GB Kit...
$66.50
Shop now
Amazon UK
Amazon Canada

While we used to recommend 16GB of RAM at this price level, based on our findings, you won't lose any performance in games dropping down to 8GB. That's a good thing, because RAM prices are still near their two-year high, as a result of constrained supply and other factors. If you have uses that you know will require more than 8GB, such as photo- or video-editing, then feel free to upgrade to 16GB. We'd recommend this Crucial 16GB set.

The Guru's Tip: There are three things to look for in high-performance RAM: (1) a frequency of at least 1600MHz; (2) ideally a "CAS" timing of 9 or lower, and (3) voltage of 1.5v or lower.

Solid-State Drive: **Samsung 840 Evo 250GB**

We're back to the market-leading Samsung 840 Evo this month, after a brief detour to the Crucial M500 last month. With the Samsung drive at a new very low price, there's just no reason to pass up on its incredible performance.

Hard Drive: **Seagate Barracuda 2TB**

We think the 2TB capacity is a sweet spot for most users, even if you get a bit more capacity/dollar with 3TB drives. 2TB drives have a longer track record, require no BIOS modifications to work, and still provide plenty of space. This Seagate Barracuda

Samsung Electronics 840...

$139.99 *Prime*

Shop now

Amazon UK
Amazon Canada

The Guru's Tip: Need help setting up and optimizing your SSD? See our SSD Guide for a step-by-step setup instructions.

Seagate Barracuda 2...

$78.95

Shop now

Amazon UK
Amazon Canada

7200RPM unit offers great speed at a great price, and it's the perfect complement to the SSD used with this build.

Case:

Rosewill Blackhawk

Rosewill Gaming ATX Mid...

$87.56   *Prime*

Shop now

Amazon UK*
Amazon Canada

We stick with the Blackhawk this month, after recently moving on from the Antec 1100 - either one is a good pick for this build. The Blackhawk's sleek styling, five included fans, and huge interior make it a great, cool-running gaming case. It also happens to be an excellent value. Just note that one of the included fans is attached to the side panel, and it may interfere with the big CPU cooler we spec for this build.

The Guru's Tip: Interested in the other case options available in this price range? Just take a look at the scrolling showcase we've put together on the right side of this page!

Power Supply:

XFX Pro 750W

XFX PRO750W Core Edition...

$91.24   *Prime*

Shop now

Amazon UK
Amazon Canada*

We go with the excellent Seasonic-built XFX Pro 750W power supply, offering a single, high-efficiency 12V rail, a 135mm ball bearing fan, and plenty of power to power not one, but two high-end video cards. Seasonic is the manufacturer of many of the best power supplies on the market sold by a whole host of companies, and has a well-deserved reputation as one of the names you can always trust.

The Guru's Tip: If you won't be adding a second video card down the line, you simply don't need this much power. So go with the Seasonic SSR-650RM unit for higher efficiency and removable cables at around the same price.

Optical Drive:

LG 24x DVD Burner

LG Electronics Optical DVD...

$21.02   *Prime*

Shop now

Amazon UK*
Amazon Canada

This inexpensive LG drive is a great addition to just about any build. Even if you never plan on burning a disc, having a DVD drive guarantees you can run software installer discs and rip your old CDs to your software jukebox of choice.

The Guru's Tip: The motherboard used for this build only comes with two SATA cables, enough for the SSD and hard drive. You'll need to pick up a third one if you don't have a spare for the DVD burner.

Operating System:

Microsoft Windows 8.1

Windows 8.1 System Builder...

$98.86   *Prime*

Shop now

Amazon UK
Amazon Canada

Windows 8.1 is fast, stable, and coming updates will make it even better. While we've previously recommended either Windows 7 or Windows 8, we now strongly recommend Windows 8.1, especially for a new gaming rig. Our in-depth benchmarks show that it outperforms Win7 in a few games, particularly Battlefield 4, and this may be just the tip of the iceberg. We do, however, suggest you use the $5 app Start8 or the shareware app Classic Shell if you like the Windows 7 interface.

CPU Cooler:

Arctic Freezer i30 Extreme

ARCTIC Freezer i30 Extreme...

$38.95   *Prime*

Shop now

Amazon UK
Amazon Canada

Given Haswell's well-known tendency to run hot, we're glad we have room in the budget for an awesome cooler. We go with the proven Arctic Freezer i30 this time around. It will have no issue dealing with a pesky overclocked 4670K.

The Guru's Tip: While every cooler comes with thermal paste, it's always nice to know you're getting premium quality. Arctic Silver 5 is the most popular, but it's definitely not the best. Luckily, the i30 comes with a tube of our favorite paste, Arctic MX-4. Other products we recommend are Noctua NT-H1 and Gelid GC-Extreme.

Total Cost: $1,437
(as of April 8, 2014)

(1) Processor: Intel Core i5-4670K ($230)
(2) Motherboard: Asus Z87-A ($140)
(3) Video Card: XFX Radeon R9 290 4GB ($440)
(4) Memory: Crucial 2x4GB DDR3-1600 ($74)
(5) Solid-State Drive: Samsung 840 EVO 250GB ($140)
(6) Hard Drive: Seagate Barracuda 2TB ($85)
(7) Case: Rosewill Blackhawk ($80)
(8) Power Supply: XFX Pro 750W ($91)
(9) Optical Drive: LG 24x DVD Burner ($19)
(10) Operating System: Windows 8.1 ($99)
(11) CPU Cooler: Arctic Freezer i30 Extreme ($39)

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