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HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

From 103-inch plasmas to Yoda backpacks, we'll help you pick the stuff you want



[head\$h0t] Controller

Fanatec/\$99 ★ ★ ★ ★

If you can get past the 1337 name, this is a k001 gaming controller. It's a package deal, featuring the "head\$h0t" mouse, "aURa" mousepad, and "emul8or" software that makes it "emul8" a joystick. An illuminated arch with software-adjustable colors and an optional strobe effect—blinky features shared with the mouse—keeps the cable out of your way, and the entire unit serves as a USB 2.0 hub. One of the more interesting things about the mouse is that you adjust its width. The default size is ideal for people with normal-sized hands, however. It's comfortable enough for day-to-day use, though the lack of side buttons is unfortunate (there are two on the face of the mouse). While the overall package looks dorky, the mouse tracks amazingly smoothly across the mousepad; it feels like there's a cushion of air between them. So, if you want a quick-moving mouse with minimal resistance and lots of glowing and pulsing parts, give this one a serious 100k. —s+3v3 b4um4n



Siberia Multi Headset Icemat/\$79.99 ★ ★ ★ ★

Black is the new white for the Siberia Headset. Even if color doesn't matter, sound does. It includes a microphone you can attach to your shirt or monitor, making it possible to eat and Skype. The mic is quite sensitive and works great with VoIP programs. The headphones' "open design" improves DVD and in-game audio positioning, meaning you can really hear those guys sneaking up behind you (unfortunately, so can nearby people). Overall, this is a great headset, and a relative bargain at \$80. —Tiffany Martin



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Q: It seems like every PC gets a good review, even the ones that are way too expensive. How is this helpful?
—Tommy Boddicker

A: It's an interesting problem. Almost all gaming PCs you can buy are various degrees of good. The performance differences are mostly related to specific hardware choices you make when buying the thing, and build quality is pretty high across the board. Though some of the decisions are tough (Intel or AMD, NVIDIA or ATI), it's never been easier to pick a PC company that will deliver a quality machine.

As for cost, we're always trying to identify the best values. So, when you're talking about budget videocards or lower-end systems, price is given greater consideration. But when you reach a certain level, you can just throw cost out the window. Either you can afford a \$4000 system (and up) or you can't. Like a Ferrari, none of those machines are particularly good values, but you have to admit, they are pretty cool.

Q: My last three home-built systems had AMD processors. I want to move up to AM2, DDR2, etc., but I'm feeling the lure of Core 2 Duo. Can you convince me not to make the switch?
—Blitzki

A: Short answer: No. Longer answer: It probably doesn't matter. Core 2 Duos are faster than Athlon 64 chips. On price and performance, Core 2 Duo wins. However, that's just taking into account the cost of the processor. Motherboards are an entirely different matter. AM2 motherboards are generally cheaper than Core 2 Duo ones, at least today.

So, if you like AMD systems, stick with AMD and AM2. If you want to go Intel, go for a 975-based motherboard and a Core 2 Duo. And if you're building your own system, shop for motherboards. Pick a vendor you dig—ASUS, Abit, whatever—and figure out which model has the features most important to you for today and tomorrow. SLI? Crossfire? RAID? Passive cooling? Then pick a price and see what fits your budget. Let that be the guide for your choice of CPU.

Send your questions to qa@cgonline.com

CASE MOD OF THE MONTH



Behold, the best mod ever. It all started with a very simple question directed at Ben Heckendorn: "Can you build an Xbox 360 laptop?" And here's the answer: the Xbox 360p. It includes an aluminum enclosure, a 720p LCD, and a custom water-cooling system. At 14 pounds, it isn't that heavy. It even has green "rings of power." Well done, Mr. Heckendorn. Well done.

