24 checks to run before you wire money to a GPU provider you have not used before.

The Fake GPU Provider Checklist

GPUs are scarce, prices are high, and buyers are in a hurry. That is the exact mix that scammers like. A fake provider can look real: a clean site, a sales rep, a price slightly under market and a wire form.

This checklist takes about an hour. It costs nothing. It will not catch every fraud, but it catches the common ones, and it gives you a record that you checked.

What this is not. It is not legal advice and not a guarantee. A provider can pass every check and still fail you later. It also does not say which providers are good. It only asks whether this one is real.

How to use it

1. Run the 8 **gate checks** first (G1 to G8). Do not send a prepayment, deposit or first invoice until all 8 pass.
2. Then run the 16 **support checks** (S1 to S16). Mark each one Pass, Fail or Unknown.
3. **Unknown is not Pass.** If the provider will not answer a question, that is an answer.
4. Read the verdict at the end.

Keep copies of what you find (screenshots, emails, command output). If something goes wrong, you will want them.

The 8 gate checks

ID	Check	How to check	Walk away if
G1	The legal entity exists.	Get the full legal name and registration number. Look it up in the official registry (a US state Secretary of State site, Companies House in the UK, or the equivalent where they say they are based).	The name does not match, the entity is dissolved, or they will not give you the number.
G2	The entity on the contract matches the entity that gets the money.	Compare the contract party, the invoice issuer and the name on the bank account or wallet.	They differ and there is no written explanation (for example a named payment agent).
G3	You can reach a real person by a route you found yourself.	Find the company phone number or office address from the registry or an independent source, not from the sales email. Call it and ask for the person who contacted you.	The number is dead, the person is unknown there, or the only contact is a chat app.
G4	The domain and email are not look-alikes.	Type the domain yourself. Check its age (a free RDAP lookup such as rdap.org, or any WHOIS tool). Check the email domain matches the site exactly.	The domain is only days or weeks old, or the email domain is a near-copy of a known brand.
G5	Payment details were confirmed by a second channel.	Confirm the bank or wallet details by phone to the number from G3. Do this again if the details ever change.	Details arrive or change by email or chat only, or you are told to hurry.

ID	Check	How to check	Walk away if
G6	You are not paying everything upfront on a first deal.	Ask for staged payments tied to delivery, or a small paid pilot first (see S10).	They insist on 100% upfront by wire or crypto for a first order, with no refund terms in writing.
G7	The price is plausible.	Compare with the public prices in the Hundredth Run GPU price tracker (same GPU, same term, same region).	The offer is far below the lowest public price for the same GPU and term, with no clear reason. That is a warning, not a bargain.
G8	The provider will put refund and failure terms in writing.	Ask for the contract and SLA before you pay. Read the termination, refund and uptime clauses.	No contract, or terms that only protect the provider.

The 16 support checks

A. Who they are

ID	Check	How to check	Red flag
S1	The people are real.	Look up the founders and sales contact on LinkedIn. Check how long the profiles have existed and who they are connected to. Reverse-search profile photos.	Stock photos, brand-new profiles, or staff who do not list the company.
S2	They will do a live video call with a named person.	Ask for a call. Ask them to show the office or the data center ticket system.	Always camera off, always "traveling", or the call keeps getting delayed.
S3	You can speak to a customer.	Ask for two references you can contact. Contact them using details you find yourself.	No references, or references only on their own site with no way to verify.
S4	The online record is consistent.	Search the company name with "scam", "review" and "complaint". Check the names of past brands and domains. Look at the Wayback Machine for the site history.	Many names for the same company, a site that appeared last month, or reports from buyers who never got hardware.

B. The hardware

ID	Check	How to check	Red flag
S5	They say where the hardware is, and the facility confirms it.	Ask for the data center name and city. Call the facility's public number and ask whether the provider is a customer. Some will not confirm. Note that as Unknown.	The location changes between answers, or the facility says they have never heard of them.
S6	They are the owner, or they tell you who is.	Ask: "Do you own this hardware, lease it, or resell it?" Brokers and resellers are legitimate. Hiding it is not.	They claim to own it, then admit it is someone else's after you ask a second time.
S7	They can show where the GPUs came from.	Ask for a redacted purchase order or invoice from an OEM or distributor, and a count of GPUs by model.	A story instead of a document, or counts that change.

ID	Check	How to check	Red flag
S8	A test node shows the real GPU.	On a trial node, run `nvidia-smi -L` and `nvidia-smi --query-gpu=name,memory.total,uuid --format=csv`. Compare the name and memory with the NVIDIA datasheet for the model you ordered.	An older or smaller GPU than quoted, the count is lower, or it is a slice of a GPU (a MIG or vGPU profile) that was not disclosed.
S9	The performance is believable.	Run a short matrix multiply or training step you already know the speed of on another cloud. For clusters, run NCCL's `all_reduce_perf` from the open source nccl-tests project across nodes.	Far slower than the same job elsewhere, or multi-node tests fail or crawl.

C. The deal

ID	Check	How to check	Red flag
S10	You start with a small paid pilot.	Pay for one day to one week first, by a method with dispute rights if you can (card), and test as in S8 and S9.	They refuse a pilot, or the pilot is not on the same hardware as the main order.
S11	Delivery is tied to payment.	Set milestones: part on signing, part on first node live and passing your tests, part on the full order.	All money before any node exists.
S12	You know the payment method's protection.	A card can often be disputed. A bank wire is hard to reverse. A stablecoin transfer is final. Pick the method to match the risk.	They push you to the method with the least protection.
S13	Termination, refund and data deletion are written down.	Read the contract. Look for: notice period, what happens if nodes are down, who owns the data, how it is wiped.	No exit clause, or "no refunds" with a long term.
S14	Export and sanctions rules are handled.	Ask where the hardware is, who the end users are, and how they follow export controls on advanced chips and sanctions rules.	They offer to move or route hardware in a way that sounds built to avoid the rules. Walk away.

D. Your own safety

ID	Check	How to check	Red flag
S15	You treat the node as untrusted until proven.	Use throwaway credentials. Do not put model weights, customer data or long-lived secrets on a node before you have verified the provider.	You are asked for cloud keys, production credentials or remote access to your own systems.
S16	You wrote down what you checked.	Save the dates, names, call notes and screenshots.	Nothing saved.

Verdict

Result	What to do
All 8 gates pass and at most 2 support checks are Unknown. No Fails.	Proceed with a small paid pilot (S10). Staged payments.
All 8 gates pass but 3 or more support checks are Unknown or any support check is a Fail you cannot explain.	Pause. Ask the provider to close the gaps in writing. Do not prepay.

Result	What to do
Any gate Fails or is Unknown.	Do not send money. Ask for what is missing, or choose a different provider.
Two or more gate Fails, or any pressure to pay before you can check.	Treat as a scam. Stop contact.

Questions to send before you pay

Copy these into an email. Their answers (or lack of them) tell you a lot.

1. What is your full legal entity name, registration number and registered address?
2. Who owns the GPUs, who owns the data center space, and who will receive my payment?
3. Which data center and city will host my nodes? Will the facility confirm that you are a customer?
4. Which exact GPU model, memory size and count will I get? Are they whole GPUs or slices?
5. How many nodes can you deliver by what date, and what do you do if you are late?
6. Can I start with a paid pilot of one week on the same hardware?
7. What is in the SLA: uptime, credits, termination and refund?
8. How can I verify the payment details by phone?
9. What is your approach to export controls and sanctions screening?
10. Can I speak to two current customers?

If you already sent money

Act fast. The first hours matter most.

1. Call your bank right away and ask for a wire recall or a card dispute. Give them the dates, amounts and recipient details.
2. If you paid by stablecoin, note the wallet address and the transaction ID. Reversal is not possible, but exchanges and law enforcement sometimes can act on reported addresses.
3. Report it. In the US: the FBI Internet Crime Complaint Center (ic3.gov) and the FTC (reportfraud.ftc.gov). Elsewhere, use your country's fraud reporting service.
4. Change any credentials you shared. Tell your own security contact.

Where the claims in this checklist come from

- Registry lookups: US state Secretaries of State, Companies House (UK) and equivalents are the official sources for whether a company exists.
- Domain age: RDAP is the public registration data protocol that replaced WHOIS for many domains. rdap.org is a free bootstrap service.
- GPU checks: `nvidia-smi` is NVIDIA's own tool. Compare memory and names with NVIDIA's public datasheet for your model. nccl-tests is NVIDIA's open source benchmark repository.
- Payment protections: your bank's and card network's published dispute and wire policies. Rules differ by country, so check yours.
- Reporting: ic3.gov (FBI) and reportfraud.ftc.gov (FTC) are the US federal reporting sites.

These steps lower your risk. They do not remove it. A provider that passes can still fail.

About Hundredth Run

Hundredth Run builds plain checklists and working templates for people who deploy AI. No hype and no invented credentials. The GPU price tracker that goes with this checklist is free: every price has a source link and a date.

Version 1.0, checked 2026-11-01. Not legal, financial or security advice.