AI's New Battleground: Inference Economics and the Agent Harness

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OpenAI's price cut, NVIDIA's high-throughput inference, and controlled harness tests point to a systems race, alongside new physical-AI and enterprise open-model signals.

Top Stories

Why it matters: Agents are increasingly competed on cost, latency, and scaffolding—not only model capability. [1, 2]

- **Inference economics is moving into the product surface.** OpenAI cut GPT-5.6 Sol API prices 20% for input and 33% for output, to $4/$20 per million tokens through at least Nov. 21. Arena reports that the cut moved Sol's frontier position in Code and Work, while Luna reached the overall and all three category frontiers at $0.04–$0.08 per task. [3, 1] Artificial Analysis also measured 3,431 output tokens/s for Gemma 4 31B on a private Groq 3 LPX endpoint, stable from 10K to 100K input tokens; NVIDIA says the rack is in full-scale production. [4]
- **Harness choice is now a measurable competitive variable.** In a same-model Opus 4.6 task—cloning Excalidraw from browser inspection through verification—Factory Droid finished in 8 minutes with 20 tool calls at $1.60, versus Claude Code's 19 minutes, 40 calls, and $1.87. The tester says the harness was the only difference; it is one controlled comparison, but a clear cost and execution lever. [2]
- **Physical AI posted a sharp benchmark jump.** Team Tianjiao's robot won the World Humanoid Robot Games long-jump final at 7.97 meters, 0.98 meters below Mike Powell's record and well above the 1.25-

meter robot best reported for 2025. It is a concrete athletic-control result, not evidence of general robotics. [5]

Research & Innovation

Why it matters: The highest-leverage work is moving into the agent loop—serving, evaluation, and recoverable execution state. [6, 7]

- **AgentX 1.0 makes agentic inference measurable.** SemiAnalysis released an open-source multi-turn coding benchmark built from roughly $3 million of real traces across 1,000-plus chips and about 2 MW of compute. vLLM reports sparse KV retention above a 95% cache-hit rate for 14 concurrent requests with contexts up to 1M tokens, while rate-matched prefill/decode reached 4.45× the throughput at 60 tok/s on GB300 Dynamo versus B300. [6]
- **Video serving is being redesigned, not merely scaled.** NVIDIA SANA's Sol Engine work on MiniMax H3 combines a four-step low-resolution draft with a three-step LTX refinement pass and reduced 10-second 768p generation on one GB200 from 414 seconds to 14.93 seconds—a reported 27.7× speedup. [8]
- **ACES questions static agent-skill gates.** Across 145 real skills, structural scan scores correlated with LLM-judge quality at only Spearman =0.14. The proposed Skill Lift instead compares the same task with and without a skill under identical conditions; its evaluation covered 947 paired cases, 58 production skills, and four harnesses. [7]

Products & Launches

Why it matters: Agent products are becoming cross-provider control planes and enterprise-ready connector layers. [9, 10]

- **AgentSky launched an "OpenRouter for Agents."** Its API connects Claude Code, Codex, DeepSeek, Kimi, OpenCode, and other cloud agents; Agent Playground runs identical tasks with real tools such as GitHub and Gmail while comparing time, cost, and tokens side by side. The launch reports a $150-versus-$2 same-task gap but leaves the cheaper system for readers to guess. [9, 11]
- **Claude's enterprise-managed MCP authentication is generally available.** Admins centralize authorization through an identity provider, users connect tools without individual OAuth, and developers can apply the system to third-party connectors in Claude's directory. [10, 12]

Industry Moves

Why it matters: Organizations and governments are pairing open models with proprietary data and dedicated compute rather than relying entirely on frontier

APIs. [13, 14]

- **Thomson Reuters is pursuing model ownership.** DatologyAI says Thomson-1.0-Large used its domain-relevant proprietary data, cost $450,000 in compute, and is competitive with closed frontier models at a fraction of deployment cost. A current report says Thomson Reuters built the model on Alibaba's Qwen to reduce reliance on Claude. [13, 15]
- **South Korea is funding a narrowed sovereign-model race.** Its government-backed competition reduced Round 2 from four teams to Upstage, SK Telecom, and LG AI Research. Each advancing team is expected to receive roughly 1,000 NVIDIA B200 GPUs for six months—about ₩40 billion per team—with the field planned to narrow to two in early 2027. [14]

Policy & Regulation

Why it matters: Regulatory scrutiny is reaching the financial infrastructure funding AI bets. [16]

- **The SEC is examining an AI hedge fund's financing and leverage.** MTSlive reports, citing the New York Times, that the agency subpoenaed banks that lent to and traded for Situational Awareness and ordered them to preserve related records. [16]

Quick Takes

Why it matters: Practical deployments continue to spread across climate response, defense, and everyday AI operations. [17, 18]

- **Flood forecasting:** Google says Flood Hub and Groundsource forecast riverine floods up to seven days ahead and urban flash floods up to 24 hours, with alerts intended for 2 billion people across 150 countries. [17]
- **Defense autonomy:** A team building autonomous interceptors in Ukraine reports 45 units sold to a special-forces unit and $500 million in letters of intent, all within eight weeks. [18]
- **Usage controls:** ChatGPT Work and Codex will restore a five-hour Plus-account limit to smooth compute demand and prevent accidental exhaustion of weekly usage; the $100 and $200 Pro tiers remain exempt for now. [19]

Sources

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