

Alta Ares Raises \$60M as AMI Labs and Vertical AI Teams Draw Attention

VC Tech Radar

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A defense-tech Series A and a new \$150M early-stage fund lead this batch, alongside standout signals from Sandstone, FetchSandbox, and Shiftia. The deeper themes are physical AI, improving local inference economics, and investor attention shifting toward infrastructure constraints and leaner founding teams.

Funding & Deals

- **Alta Ares — \$60M Series A.** Air Street led a \$60M Series A in Alta Ares to accelerate air defense for autonomous warfare [1]. The company is described as building the Iron Dome for autonomous air defense, with roots on the battlefield in Ukraine and current expansion across Europe, the Middle East, and Asia [1]. Co-investors include Harpoon Ventures, Cherry Ventures, and OTB Ventures [1]. Nathan Benaich later framed Alta Ares as a candidate to become France’s next major defense champion [2].
- **Section32 — \$150M early-stage fund.** Bill Maris raised \$150M for a new early-stage fund, Section32 [3]. Maris previously founded and led Google Ventures and served as Google’s VP of Special Projects, where he incubated Waymo, Google X, and Calico [3]. He pointed to prior investments including CrowdStrike, Cohere, and Coinbase [3]. His argument for staying smaller is selectivity and founder attention [3]. He also cited data that funds smaller than \$750M averaged 4.76x versus 2.42x for funds larger than \$1B, and represented 95% of top-decile performers in that period [3]. He pointed to AI infrastructure and human biology as current areas of interest, rather than larger models themselves [3].

Emerging Teams

- **Sandstone.** Sandstone is building an AI-native workflow platform for in-house legal teams, starting at intake and routing across business systems, then building a legal-specific context graph behind the workflow layer [4]. Founder Nick Fleischer studied software engineering, later led McKinsey’s legal tech practice, and started the company with a former in-house lawyer [4]. Fleischer says the broader team combines long-time Google Drive engineers with former big-law partners, general counsels, heads of legal ops, and alumni of Ironclad, Brightflag, and Luminance [4]. The company argues the in-house legal market is larger than the law-firm market and could become winner-take-all if one platform becomes legal’s day-to-day home [4]. Demand looks strong: Fleischer says some 10-20 person legal teams at 1,000-2,000 employee companies have signed purchase orders the same day as the demo [4]. Sandstone’s claimed defensibility rests on team quality, the context layer, and hard integrations across legal and business systems [4].
- **FetchSandbox.** FetchSandbox is building stateful API sandboxes for AI coding agents, letting users spin up sandboxes, map webhook flows across services like Stripe, Resend, and Clerk, and test full sequences before writing integration code [5]. The founder says the product now has 1,000 MAU, 1,045 MCP installs per month, and 55 live APIs, with slow but compounding organic growth [5].
- **Shiftia.** After six months of building, Shiftia is targeting shift planning in hospitals, care homes, and call centers, with the founder saying early customer conversations surfaced fear of labor inspections more than time lost as the core pain [6]. The product validates labor-rule constraints automatically, including minimum rest periods, against a backdrop of real 6,000€ fines [6]. It also adds fairness metrics for unpopular shifts, sub-second AI matching for replacement coverage, and audit history for regulators [6]. The founder’s framing is blunt: the moat is solving the customer’s legal pain, not merely adding AI [6].
- **Suhail’s new venture.** Suhail said he is back in the game starting with two 8xB200 systems [7], has been revisiting fundamentals after time spent on image models [8], is running an autonomous AI scientist on new optimizations [9], and is hiring employee #1 [10].

AI & Tech Breakthroughs

- **LeCun’s JEPA and world-model push into physical AI.** Yann LeCun said he left Meta and formed AMI Labs to pursue physical AI, robotics, and control problems that are high-dimensional, continuous, and noisy [11]. His core technical argument is JEPA: predict in representation space rather than reconstruct every detail, which he says is a better route to grounded intelligence, planning, common sense, and hierarchical con-

trol [11]. In the examples he discussed, impossible physical events drive prediction error sharply higher, and the learned representation supports depth prediction and 3D understanding from video alone [11].

- **Single-GPU local inference is still moving fast.** A practitioner benchmark reported Qwen3.6-27B on a single 3090 improving from 35.7 tok/s in Ollama to 80.2 tok/s in llama.cpp with MTP [12]. Even as a single data point, it adds to the evidence that local-model serving on commodity hardware is still improving quickly [12].
- **Applied AI guardrails are getting more explicit in regulated wellness.** Ones describes a five-step system that ingests blood panels, wearable data, health goals, medications, and allergies; prioritizes biomarkers; selects from 70+ ingredients with evidence anchors; optimizes dosage; and runs a separate critic agent for safety and interaction validation [13, 14]. The company says every early-user formula is also reviewed by medical professionals and the pack updates every 60 days as new data arrives [13]. Legally, it is positioned as a DSHEA dietary supplement with structure/function claims only, plus explicit consent around AI analysis and lab-data processing [15].

Market Signals

- **Infrastructure bottlenecks are becoming the front-line debate.**

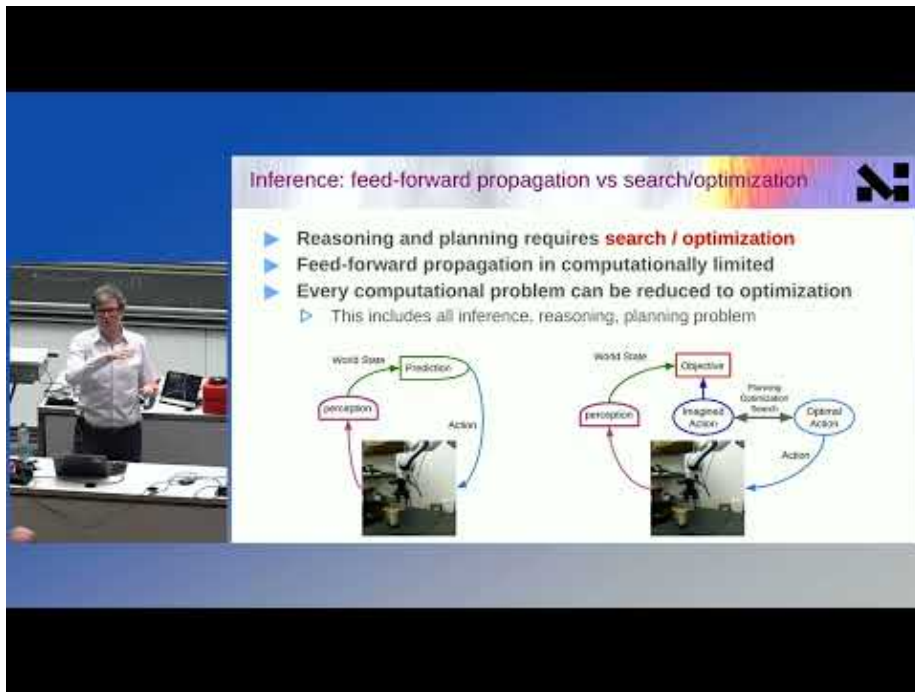
The biggest problem today is power. [16]

Harry Stebbings also expects continued resistance to data-centre buildout [16]. That lines up with Bill Maris' preference to invest in controllers, physics engines, GPUs, and platforms rather than larger models themselves [3].

- **Coding agents continue to post numbers that contradict the idea they will die in the path of AGI labs.** Sarah Guo pointed to strong metrics at Cursor, Lovable, and Cognition as a narrative violation for that bearish view [17].
- **Lean founding teams are getting structurally more capable.** A post later amplified by Marc Andreessen argues that a single founder can now ship full apps, design product, generate and distribute clips, replace support, analyze user behavior, and automate lead generation with current AI-native tools [18]. Andreessen's response was terse, but the toolchain itself is a useful screen for unusually efficient teams [19, 18].
- **Perplexity is seeding early startup formation with credits.** Perplexity launched the Billion Pound Build competition, offering early-stage teams a share of £1M in Computer credits; the pitch phase is open and closes July 6 [20].

Worth Your Time

- **Yann LeCun: World Models: Enabling the next AI revolution.** Useful for the AMI Labs thesis and the case that JEPA-style world models may matter more than generative reconstruction for physical AI [11].



Yann LeCun: World Models: Enabling the next AI revolution (52:00)

- **How AI Is Transforming In-House Legal | Nick Fleisher, Sandstone.** Useful if you are evaluating vertical AI teams that combine founder-market fit, deep workflow ownership, and a domain-specific context layer [4].
- **Bill Maris: How Google Could Crush AI Competitors, Why Small Funds Win, and AI's Atari Stage.** Worth watching for a clear venture-market thesis: smaller funds, heavier selectivity, and an AI stack bias toward infrastructure and biology rather than direct large-model bets [3].



Bill Maris: How Google Could Crush AI Competitors, Why Small Funds Win, and AI's Atari Stage (20:27)

- **Air Street's Alta Ares Series A note.** This is the follow-on read linked from the funding announcement if Alta Ares fits your defense-tech filter [21].
- **One-person startup window thread.** Short, but useful for resetting what a technically capable solo founder can plausibly do in 2026 with the current AI toolchain [18, 19].

Sources

1. X post by @nathanbenaich
2. X post by @nathanbenaich
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