Episode Book

EPISODE #6037

Gemini 4 Argon: Google's Million-Token Flagship

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SYNOPSIS

Google's Gemini 4 Argon is positioned as a frontier reasoning model, but the model card leaves out architecture, parameter count, and licensing, and the page quotes no pricing at all. We walk through what's actually documented: a 1,048,576-token unified input/output limit, low/medium/high thinking levels, implicit caching only, and a wide tool surface including function calling, code execution, Search grounding, and a preview computer-use mode. Then we separate Google's nineteen-row benchmark table from independent testing — Artificial Analysis at 53 on the Intelligence Index, Vals AI ranking it first of 49 models — and note where the losses cluster: terminal-based agentic coding and computer use. We also cover the staged rollout through the Fairwind Program and the launch discount that changes the cost-per-task math.

TRANSCRIPT



Corn

Welcome back to My Weird Prompts, the show where two brothers who work in AI try to make sense of the models everyone's suddenly talking about. I'm Corn.



Herman

And I'm Herman. Today we're doing something a little different. This is a Model Spotlight episode, so no prompt of the week, no listener question. We're just going to spend the next twenty minutes or so on one model.



Corn

And the model is Gemini 4 Argon. Built by Google, living on the Google AI for Developers pages, model ID gemini-4-argon. Herman, set the scene. Who is this lab and where does Argon sit in their lineup?



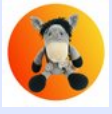
Herman

So Google DeepMind is the research arm, and the developer-facing surface is the Gemini API, which is the same place you'd go for their other Gemini models, plus Imagen for images and Veo for video. The interesting framing here is that Argon is Google's first proprietary model above the Flash class in over seven months. That's from Artificial Analysis and it lines up with what the press was saying. The Verge ran a piece titled, roughly, Google finally releases Gemini 4 Argon, with the subheading about Google having trailed its rivals for months.



Corn

So there's a narrative here. Google was seen as behind, and Argon is the answer.



Herman

That's the framing, yes. Futurum Group called it Google returning to the frontier. The Batch from DeepLearning.AI described it as the first non-Flash proprietary model in over seven months. And the Google blog post announcing it positions it as a frontier model for complex workflows across software engineering, enterprise knowledge work like legal and finance, and cybersecurity defense.



Corn

And the rollout was staged, right? Not a big open launch on day one.



Herman

Correct. The initial announcement rolled it out to what Google calls trusted cyber defenders through something called the Fairwind Program. Then on October thirteenth it went to developers and enterprises via the API, in AI Studio and the Gemini platform, plus Google AI Ultra subscribers in Antigravity, and Ultra and Pro subscribers in the Gemini app and AI Mode in Search. So roughly a two-week gap between the limited announcement and general developer access.



Corn

Good. That's the lab and the launch context. Next we get into what this thing actually is, because the model card is generous in some places and conspicuously quiet in others.



Herman

It is. Let's dig in.



Corn

So what is it, technically? What do we actually know?



Herman

It's a flagship reasoning model. That's the positioning Google uses, and it's multimodal on the input side. Text, image, video, audio, and PDF all go in. Text comes out. So it's not generating images or audio, and it's not a Live API model either. Those are explicitly listed as not supported.



Corn

So input-heavy, text-out. What about the context window?



Herman

This is the headline number. One million forty-eight thousand five hundred and seventy-six tokens. And that's a unified input and output limit, which is unusual. Most models give you a context window and then a separate, smaller max output. Here the ceiling is the same number for both.



Corn

But there's a caveat on output, right?



Herman

There is. The default synchronous max output is sixty-five thousand five hundred and thirty-six tokens. To get up to the full million on the output side, you need what Google calls long decode. And the page doesn't explain how you enable that, what it costs, or what the latency penalty is. It just says long decode up to one million tokens is supported.



Corn

So if you're planning around that, you're planning around a feature whose mechanics aren't documented on the page.



Herman

Correct. And that matters, because long decode is one of the four things Google names in its own positioning sentence. The verbatim line is that Argon is their flagship reasoning model, built for complex software engineering, deep mathematical and scientific problem solving, autonomous multi-step agents, and long decode up to one million tokens.



Corn

What about the reasoning controls?



Herman

Thinking is supported at three levels. Low, medium, and high. That's consistent with how the other frontier labs are exposing reasoning effort now. You pick how much compute the model spends thinking before it answers.



Corn

Architecture? Parameter count? Training approach?



Herman

Not stated. None of it. The page doesn't list parameter count, doesn't describe the architecture, doesn't say anything about training data or training methodology. So we can't do the apples-to-apples comparison on size that you'd normally do in one of these profiles. We just don't have the numbers.



Corn

And licence? Weights?



Herman

Also not stated on the page. Vals AI lists the weights as private, so the working assumption is proprietary, but the model page itself doesn't say. That's worth flagging because Google does ship open models under the Gemma line, so it's not a given that a Google model is closed. Here, though, the evidence points to closed.



Corn

Caching. That's usually where these profiles get interesting.



Herman

Implicit caching only. Explicit caching is not supported. So you get whatever the platform decides to cache automatically, but you can't pin a prefix or a document and say keep this warm. If you're building something with a large stable system prompt or a big reference document you reuse across calls, that's a real constraint. You're at the mercy of implicit



Herman (continued)

cache behaviour rather than controlling it.



Corn

What about the tooling surface?



Herman

It's broad. Function calling, structured outputs, code execution, file search, URL context, Search grounding, and grounding with Google Maps. Computer use is there but it's marked Preview. And there's a feature called agentic video understanding, which defaults to something called static. The page doesn't explain what static means or what the alternative is.



Corn

So a lot of capability surface, and a few documentation gaps.



Herman

That's the honest read. The feature list is long. The explanatory depth on the newer features is thin.



Corn

Consumption options?



Herman

Batch API, Flex inference, and Priority inference. So you can trade latency against cost depending on the workload, which is the standard three-tier pattern at this point.



Corn

Okay. So we know the shape of it. Multimodal in, text out, million-token unified window, thinking levels, implicit caching only, wide tool surface. And we don't know the architecture, the size, or the licence.



Herman

Right. Which takes us to the part where we'd normally talk about what it costs. And that's where this gets awkward.



Corn

Okay. Pricing. And you said this gets awkward.



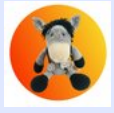
Herman

It does, because the model page itself lists no pricing at all. Input, cached input, output, batch, tiered, none of it. The page describes the capability surface in detail and then simply does not quote a rate. So anything we say here comes from elsewhere, and I should flag it. All pricing we're about to cite is as of October sixteenth, twenty twenty-six. These numbers shift, sometimes weekly.



Corn

Understood. So what do we actually have?



Herman

Vals AI lists token costs at four dollars per million input and twenty dollars per million output. That's the headline rate. Separately, Artificial Analysis reports a fifty percent launch discount, which puts the cost per Intelligence Index task at one dollar and ninety-nine cents, and they frame that as roughly sixty percent below the cost per task of GPT-6 Astra at discounted prices.



Corn

So the list rate and the effective rate are two different stories.



Herman

They are. And that's the thing to hold onto. The four and twenty figure is the sticker. The discount is what makes the cost per task comparison land where it lands. If the discount is temporary, the economics change when it ends. We don't have a stated end date for it in what we've read.



Corn

What about cached input?



Herman

Not listed anywhere we found. Which is consistent with the model page, because explicit caching isn't supported on Argon at all. Implicit caching only. So there's no published cached-input rate to quote, and structurally there's no way for you to pin a prefix and manage that cost yourself.



Corn

Batch pricing?



Herman

Batch API is listed as a supported consumption option, but no batch rate is published in what we have. Same for Flex and Priority inference. The tiers exist. The prices for them don't appear in our sources.



Corn

So the honest summary is one list rate, one discounted effective rate, and a lot of blanks.



Herman

That's exactly where it sits. Four in, twenty out as the sticker. One ninety-nine per Intelligence Index task at the launch discount. Everything else, we don't know yet.



Corn

Okay, benchmarks. And I want to be careful here, because there are two different stories. What Google claims, and what independent testers are actually measuring.



Herman

Right. And they mostly agree, which is worth noting. Let's start with Google's own launch table. They published nineteen benchmark rows. Argon leads thirteen of them outright, ties one, and trails on five.



Corn

Which five?



Herman

FrontierSWE v2, Terminal-bench four point oh, PostTrainBench, Terminal-Bench Science zero point one, and OSWorld two point oh. So the losses cluster around terminal-based agentic coding and computer use. That's a real pattern, not noise.



Corn

And the wins?



Herman

Google reports seventy-seven point nine percent on DeepSWE v1.1, which is a long-horizon software engineering benchmark. First place at fifty-one point three percent on Zapier's AutomationBench. And they claim leadership across knowledge work, science and math, and multimodal categories.



Corn

Now the independent side.



Herman

Artificial Analysis puts Argon at fifty-three on their Intelligence Index with high reasoning enabled. That ties GPT-6 Astra at max and edges GPT-6.1 Sol by one point. And they specifically attribute the gains to lower hallucinations and stronger agentic capabilities. That's a meaningful detail, because it's not raw reasoning horsepower, it's reliability.



Corn

Vals AI?



Herman

Vals ranks it number one of forty-nine models on their index at sixty-eight point nine percent. And their standout is Finance Agent v2, where it's number one of seventy-nine. So the finance and enterprise knowledge work positioning holds up under at least one independent harness.



Corn

The New Stack headline said it tops OpenAI and Anthropic on most benchmarks but coding scores are mixed. That tracks with the five losses.



Herman

It does. And Futurum's read is similar. They say early independent tests put it at the level of OpenAI's best and behind Anthropic's. So the picture is, frontier-tier, not unambiguously first.



Corn

Anything that stands out as unusual versus comparables?



Herman

Two things. One, the long decode capability, up to a million output tokens. That's not a benchmark row, but it's a structural differentiator. Most frontier models cap output well below that. Two, the agentic video understanding, which defaults to a static mode. That's an unusual default and we don't have detail on what it means in practice.



Corn

What about the model card itself?



Herman

The DeepMind model card says Argon was evaluated across agentic coding, ML engineering, computer use, knowledge work, science and math, multimodal, long-context, and cybersecurity. They point to a separate evals methodology page for the how. We haven't seen scores from that page directly, just the pointer.



Corn

So the honest summary. Google claims broad leadership, independents mostly confirm it, with coding and computer use as the soft spots.



Herman

That's where the evidence sits. And I'd flag one thing. The Artificial Analysis result is at high reasoning, which is the most expensive setting. The fifty-three is not the cheap-mode number.



Corn

So given all that, where does Argon actually win? Let's get concrete.



Herman

Start with the thing Google is loudest about, which is long-horizon software engineering. The DeepSWE v1.1 result, seventy-seven point nine percent, is a long-horizon benchmark. That word matters. It means tasks that span many steps, where the model has to hold a



Herman (continued)

plan together across a large codebase without drifting. If you're building an agent that refactors a service, migrates a dependency tree, or works a ticket queue over hours, that's the target.



Corn

And the context window supports that.



Herman

One million forty-eight thousand five hundred and seventy-six tokens, unified across input and output. That's the number on the model card. So you can hand it a large repo slice and still leave room for it to reason.



Corn

What about the output side? That's the unusual one.



Herman

Default synchronous output caps at sixty-five thousand five hundred and thirty-six tokens. But there's a long decode mode that goes up to the full million. That's the structural differentiator I mentioned. If your workload is generate a large artifact in one pass, a long spec, a big migration file, a full test suite, that's where this is interesting. Most frontier models will force you to chunk.



Corn

Second cluster. Enterprise knowledge work.



Herman

Vals AI has it number one of seventy-nine on Finance Agent v2, and number one of forty-nine overall on their index. Google positions it for legal and finance explicitly. So document-heavy analysis, multi-step research, contract review, financial modeling support. The lower hallucination rate that Artificial Analysis flagged is the thing that



Herman (continued)

makes that credible, because in finance and legal, a confident wrong answer is worse than no answer.



Corn

Third cluster. Cybersecurity.



Herman

This one has a caveat. Google rolled Argon out first to vetted cyber defenders through the Fairwind Program before general availability. That tells you something about where they think the model is strongest and also about how they wanted to control the release. If you're in security operations, threat analysis, or defensive tooling, that's a signal worth reading.



Corn

And the agentic surface area.



Herman

The model card lists function calling, structured outputs, code execution, file search, URL context, Search grounding, and Google Maps grounding. Plus computer use in preview and agentic video understanding. So if you're building a multi-step agent that needs to call tools, retrieve, and act, the primitives are all there. The AutomationBench first place at fifty-one point three percent is the supporting evidence.



Corn

Now the other side. Where does it not win?



Herman

The five benchmark losses cluster on terminal-based agentic coding and computer use. FrontierSWE v2, Terminal-bench four point oh, Terminal-Bench Science zero point one, OSWorld two point oh. So if your workload is a model driving a terminal or a desktop GUI,



Herman (continued)

the evidence says look elsewhere or at least test carefully.



Corn

And the hard exclusions.



Herman

No audio generation, no image generation, no Live API. Text output only. And explicit caching is not supported, only implicit. So if your architecture depends on pinning a cache for cost control, that's a design constraint you need to know about before you commit.



Corn

Anything you'd flag as unknown rather than bad?



Herman

Latency and throughput. The card gives us nothing. And long decode, we don't know what it requires to enable or what it costs in wall-clock time. So if you're evaluating for a latency-sensitive product, you're going to have to measure it yourself.



Corn

Fair. That's the workload picture.



Corn

Let's talk about how this landed. Because the reception story here is split, and I think the split is the interesting part.



Herman

It is. Start with the framing. The Verge headline on October thirteenth was, roughly, Google finally releases Gemini 4 Argon, with the subtext that Google had been trailing its rivals for months. Futurum Group called it Google's first frontier model in more than seven months. So the press narrative wasn't "Google surprises everyone." It was "Google gets back in the room."



Corn

And The New Stack's headline was blunter. Something like, it's great, and you can't have it yet.



Herman

And that captures the access story. Google rolled Argon out first to vetted cyber defenders through the Fairwind Program before general availability. The Verge and Reuters both covered the October thirteenth developer and enterprise launch, and the Google blog post confirms global availability via the API in AI Studio and the Gemini platform, plus Ultra subscribers in Antigravity, and Ultra and Pro subscribers in the Gemini app and AI Mode in Search. So the "you can't have it" phase was real but short.



Corn

What about the benchmark reception specifically? Because there's a nuance there.



Herman

There is. Artificial Analysis put Argon at fifty-three on their Intelligence Index with high reasoning, which ties GPT-6 Astra at max and edges GPT-6.1 Sol at fifty-two. They framed it as Google returning to the top three labs. But they also noted the gains were driven by lower hallucinations and stronger agentic capabilities rather than a clean sweep. And The New Stack flagged that coding scores were mixed. Futurum said early independent tests put it at the level of OpenAI's best and behind Anthropic's.



Corn

So the honest read is, strong on knowledge work and agentic tasks, competitive but not dominant on coding.



Herman

That's what the coverage says. And then there's the APIdog breakdown, which is worth citing because it did the row-by-row accounting. Argon leads thirteen of nineteen rows in Google's own launch table, ties one, and trails five. The five losses are FrontierSWE v2, Terminal-bench four point oh, PostTrainBench, Terminal-Bench Science zero point one, and OSWorld two point oh. That's a specific, checkable claim, and it lines up with the mixed-coding narrative.



Corn

Any red flags in the reception? Things that aren't about benchmarks?



Herman

Two worth naming. First, the AI Studio daily caps story from early October. Google added daily usage limits to each AI Studio model on September twenty-ninth, and some paying developers reported lock-outs after fewer than ten prompts in long chats, with no in-product counter to track usage. That's a developer-experience complaint, not a model-quality complaint, but it's part of the reception picture. Second, there's a thread on the Google AI Developers Forum about Ultra for Business users not being able to access Argon in the Antigravity app or CLI. So access tiering has been messier than the launch blog implies.



Corn

And the Fairwind rollout. Does anyone read that as a controversy or as sensible caution?



Herman

Mostly sensible caution, but it does mean the earliest external evaluations came from a restricted pool. If you're the kind of person who wants independent third-party evals before you commit, the timeline matters. The model card is out, the evals methodology page is referenced, but the independent benchmarking community has had weeks, not months.



Corn

Which is the caveat I'd want on the record. The reception is positive but young.



Herman

Agreed. Positive, specific on the wins, specific on the losses, and thin on long-run reliability data.



Corn

So let's land this. If you're an AI professional deciding whether to reach for Gemini 4 Argon, what's the short version?



Herman

Short version is, it's a frontier reasoning model that's competitive at the top of the field, and the specific place it wins is long-horizon work where the model has to hold a lot of context and keep making progress across many steps. That's the positioning Google put on the page, and it's roughly what the independent coverage found too.



Corn

When would you actually reach for it?



Herman

Four cases stand out. First, if your workload is long context, the million-token window is the headline feature, and the long decode mode that goes up to a million output tokens is unusual. If you're doing something like whole-repo software engineering, or long document synthesis, or multi-hour agent runs, that's where this is interesting. Second, agentic workflows with tool use. Function calling, code execution, file search, URL context, Search grounding, Maps grounding, all of that is first-class. Third, knowledge work in legal, finance, and science, which is where the benchmark wins cluster. And fourth, if you're already in the Google stack, the integration story is straightforward.



Corn

When would you not?



Herman

A few clear cases. If you need image or audio generation, this isn't the model. Those are explicitly not supported. If you need the Live API, same. If you need explicit caching, that's not supported either, only implicit. And if your workload is short, cheap, high-volume calls where a smaller model would do, there's no reason to pay frontier prices for that.



Corn

What about the coding question, since that's the one people will ask?



Herman

The honest answer is mixed. It leads most of Google's own benchmark table, but it trails on five rows, and those losses skew toward software engineering and terminal-style agentic benchmarks. So if your use case is specifically autonomous coding agents, you should test it against your own workload rather than trust the aggregate. The New Stack flagged the same thing. Strong on knowledge work, competitive but not dominant on coding.



Corn

The caveats you'd want on the record before someone commits?



Herman

Three. Pricing moves, so check current rates before you budget. The independent evaluation window is weeks, not months, so long-run reliability data is thin. And the access tiering has been messier than the launch blog implies, so verify what your plan actually gets you before you build around it.



Corn

Which is the fair summary. Strong model, specific strengths, real gaps, and a reception that's positive but young. If your workload matches the strengths, it's worth a serious look. If it doesn't, there's no reason to force it.



Herman

That's the verdict.