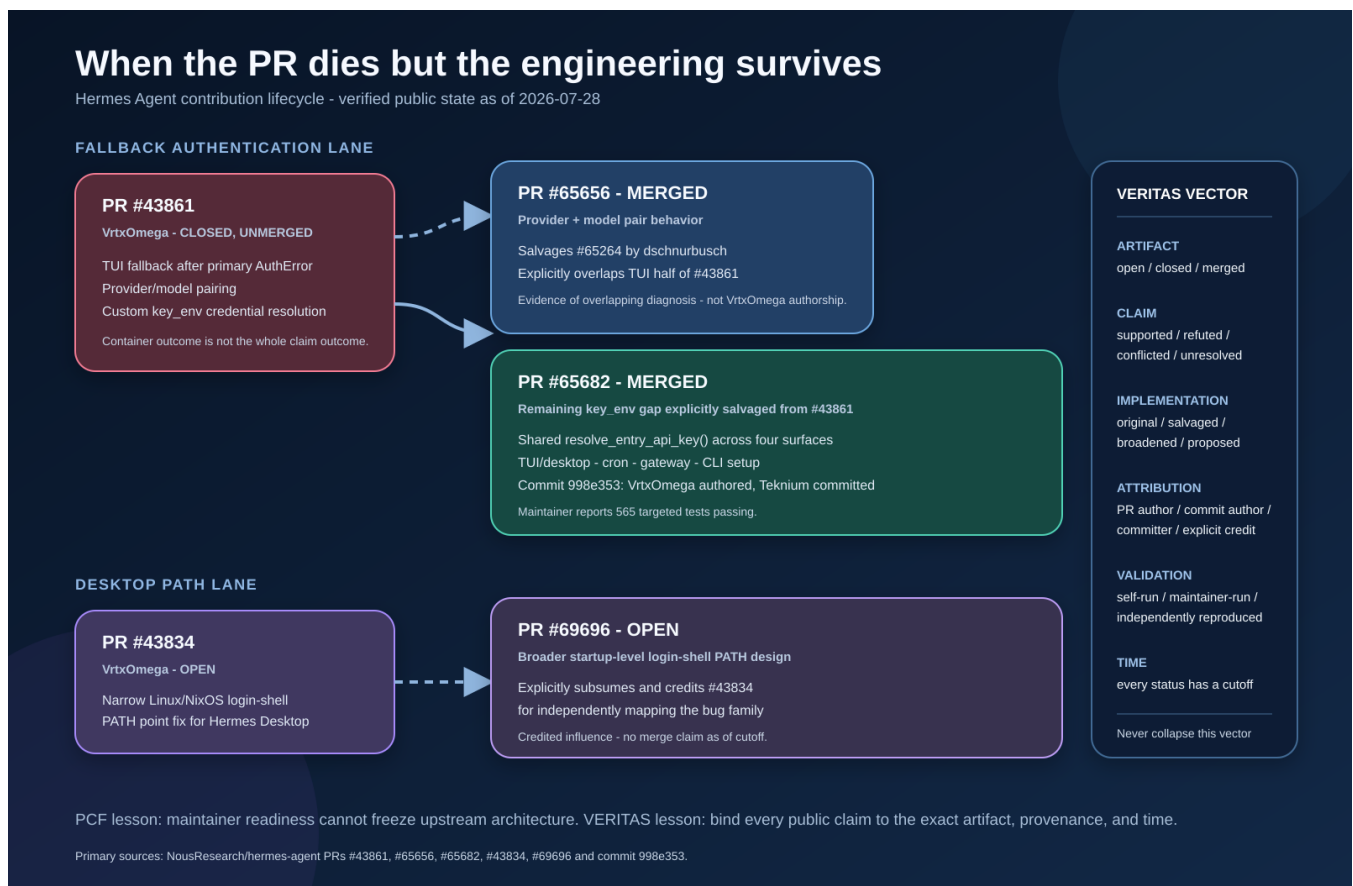


OPERATIONAL CASE STUDY

When the PR Dies but the Engineering Survives

Hermes Agent, PCF, and the VERITAS contribution-lifecycle model

"The patch became stale. The engineering requirement survived."



Prepared for RJ Lopez / VrtxOmega | Evidence cutoff 2026-07-28

Executive finding

This case demonstrates why pull-request status, technical validity, upstream incorporation, and authorship must be recorded as separate facts.

VrtxOmega's original Hermes Agent fallback PR [#43861](#) is closed and was not merged. That mechanical outcome did not settle every technical claim inside the PR.

The contribution separated into two materially different paths:

1. Provider/model pairing overlapped the TUI portion of merged PR [#65656](#). That PR salvaged [#65264](#) by another contributor. It is evidence that the diagnosis overlapped a real upstream requirement, but it is not VrtxOmega authorship.
2. The remaining `key_env` resolution gap was explicitly salvaged from [#43861](#) by merged PR [#65682](#). Its final commit, [998e35313a42f7d4fb82646ee57d0aea57f077c0](#), is authored by Rage Lopez/VrtxOmega and committed by Teknium.

A second contribution follows a third path. PR [#43834](#), a narrower Linux/NixOS login-shell PATH fix, remains open. The broader maintainer PR [#69696](#) also remains open and explicitly says it subsumes and credits [#43834](#) for independently mapping the bug family. That is credited technical influence, not a merge.

Why this belongs in VERITAS

The case exposes a category error that assurance systems frequently make:

They collapse the status of the container into the status of every claim carried by the container.

A pull request is a transport and review artifact. It may become stale because files move, architecture changes, another patch lands, or a maintainer chooses a broader design. None of those conditions alone proves that every diagnosis, test, invariant, or implementation idea inside the PR was false.

VERITAS therefore needs separate identities for:

- the contribution artifact;
- each technical claim;
- each evidence item;
- each implementation;
- each upstream incorporation;
- each attribution statement;
- each current deployment state.

These identities can change independently over time.

Evidence graph

Node	Live state	What the primary source establishes	Attribution boundary
PR #43861	Closed, unmerged	VrtxOmega proposed TUI fallback handling and regression coverage	The original PR itself did not merge
PR #65656	Merged 2026-07-16	Provider and model now switch together on the affected fallback surfaces; the PR explicitly notes overlap with #43861	It salvages #65264 by dschnurbusch, not VrtxOmega

Node	Live state	What the primary source establishes	Attribution boundary
PR #65682	Merged 2026-07-16	The remaining <code>key_env</code> gap from #43861 was reapplied, centralized, and used across four fallback surfaces	PR authored by teknium1; final commit authorship preserved for VrtxOmega
Commit 998e353	In <code>main</code>	GitHub records Rage Lopez/VrtxOmega as author and Teknium as committer	Commit authorship is not the same as PR authorship
PR #43834	Open	The login-shell PATH diagnosis and narrower point fix are publicly reviewable	No merge claim
PR #69696	Open	The broader startup-level PATH design explicitly subsumes and credits #43834	Credit and technical influence are not the same as merged code

Claim-by-claim disposition

C1 - Fallback routing must preserve the provider/model pair

Disposition: [SUPPORTED_BY_UPSTREAM_OVERLAP](#)

PR #65656 says the setup-time fallback must switch provider and model as a pair, and it explicitly records overlap with the TUI half of #43861. This is strong evidence that the requirement identified in #43861 was real.

Attribution limit: #65656 salvaged a different contributor's PR. The defensible claim is that #43861 independently identified overlapping behavior, not that VrtxOmega authored #65656.

C2 - Per-entry fallback credentials must resolve through `key_env`

Disposition: [SALVAGED_AND_MERGED_WITH_AUTHORSHIP](#)

PR #65682 states that the gap remained after the other fallback work. It centralized `resolve_entry_api_key()` and applied it to TUI/desktop, cron, gateway, and CLI setup. The PR reports 565 targeted tests passing and a clean ruff run. GitHub records the final commit as authored by VrtxOmega and committed by Teknium.

Evidence limit: this documentation verifies GitHub's public records. It does not independently rerun the upstream test suite.

C3 - GUI-launched desktop apps need the login-shell PATH

Disposition: [CREDITED_IN_BROADER_OPEN_SOLUTION](#)

The maintainer review on #43834 states that the premise remained present on current `main`, while the original branch targeted Electron files that had migrated to TypeScript. PR #69696 then proposed a startup-level solution and explicitly credited #43834 among the narrower point fixes that independently mapped the bug family.

Current limit: both #43834 and #69696 remain open as of the evidence cutoff.

PCF interpretation

This is a strong contribution-lifecycle example for Premature Contribution Firewall because it separates review readiness from eventual repository history.

PCF can help a contributor submit a narrow, evidenced, tested patch. It cannot freeze upstream architecture or guarantee that the original branch will still be the preferred merge vehicle weeks later.

The correct lifecycle model is not:

```
MERGED = valuable
CLOSED = worthless
```

It is a vector:

```
artifact_state
claim_state
```

```
implementation_state
attribution_state
validation_state
deployment_state
```

For #43861, that vector is:

```
artifact_state = CLOSED_UNMERGED
claim_state = PARTLY_SUPPORTED_BY_UPSTREAM
implementation_state = KEY_ENV_SALVAGED_IN_MAIN
attribution_state = FINAL_COMMIT_AUTHORSHIP_PRESERVED
validation_state = MAINTAINER_REPORTED_TESTS
deployment_state = MERGED_FOR_KEY_ENV_ONLY
```

For #43834, the vector is different:

```
artifact_state = OPEN
claim_state = MAINTAINER_CONFIRMED_PREMISE
implementation_state = BROADER_OPEN_PR
attribution_state = EXPLICIT_CREDIT
validation_state = PR_REPORTED_TESTS
deployment_state = NOT_MERGED_AS_OF_CUTOFF
```

Red-team audit of the public story

Tempting statement	Verdict	Correct wording
"My PR #43861 was merged."	False	The PR closed unmerged; part of its work was salvaged into #65682
"I authored #65682."	False	Teknum authored the PR; the merged commit preserves VrtxOmega authorship
"My provider/model code landed through #65656."	Overstated	#65656 salvaged another contributor's work and explicitly overlaps the TUI half of #43861
"My PATH fix is merged through #69696."	False as of cutoff	#69696 is open and explicitly credits/subsumes #43834
"Nous Research endorsed VERITAS or PCF."	Unsupported	The evidence concerns specific Hermes contributions only
"565 tests independently prove the fix."	Overstated	The merged PR reports 565 targeted tests; this case study did not rerun them

What the case proves

- A stale or closed contribution can contain a valid, durable system requirement.
- Maintainer-authored salvage can preserve contributor authorship at the commit layer.
- Different claim fragments from one PR can have different upstream outcomes.
- A broader solution can credit an earlier diagnosis without incorporating its exact code.
- Accurate portfolio language must bind credit to the precise artifact and current status.

What the case does not prove

- It does not make the original PR merged.
- It does not transfer authorship of another contributor's commits.
- It does not prove every line or design decision in the original branch was correct.
- It does not show that the open PATH PR has shipped.
- It does not independently certify Hermes Agent, PCF, VERITAS, or VrtxOmega.

- It does not imply employment, partnership, or endorsement by Nous Research.

Design requirements derived for VERITAS

1. Bind verdicts to exact claim fragments, not only a PR number.
2. Preserve provenance separately for author, committer, reviewer, and merger.
3. Make time part of every status claim.
4. Reassess claims when architecture, files, or overlapping work changes.
5. Preserve contradiction and partial supersession rather than forcing a binary success/failure label.
6. Require primary-source evidence for public attribution statements.
7. Keep technical support separate from execution authority and organizational endorsement.

Canonical portfolio claim

My original Hermes Agent PR closed unmerged after the fallback architecture changed. The remaining `key_env` gap was then explicitly salvaged through maintainer PR #65682, centralized across TUI/desktop, cron, gateway, and CLI setup, and merged as commit 998e353 with my authorship preserved. A separate desktop PATH contribution remains open but is explicitly credited in the broader open PR #69696 for independently mapping that bug family.

Primary sources

- Original fallback contribution #43861
- Provider/model and OAuth salvage #65656
- `key_env` salvage #65682
- Merged commit 998e353
- Original desktop PATH contribution #43834
- Broader desktop PATH proposal #69696
- Machine-readable evidence snapshot