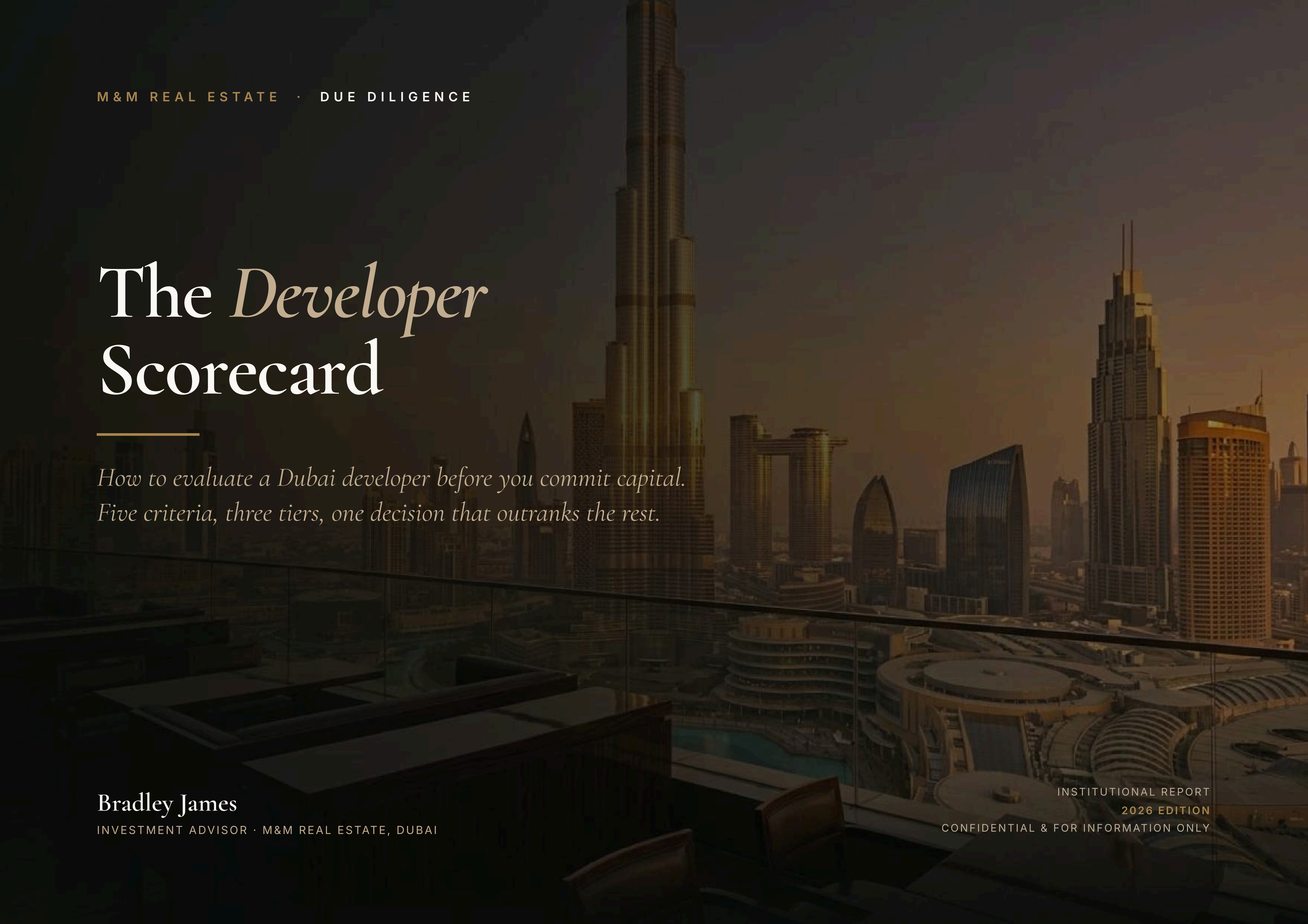


The *Developer* Scorecard

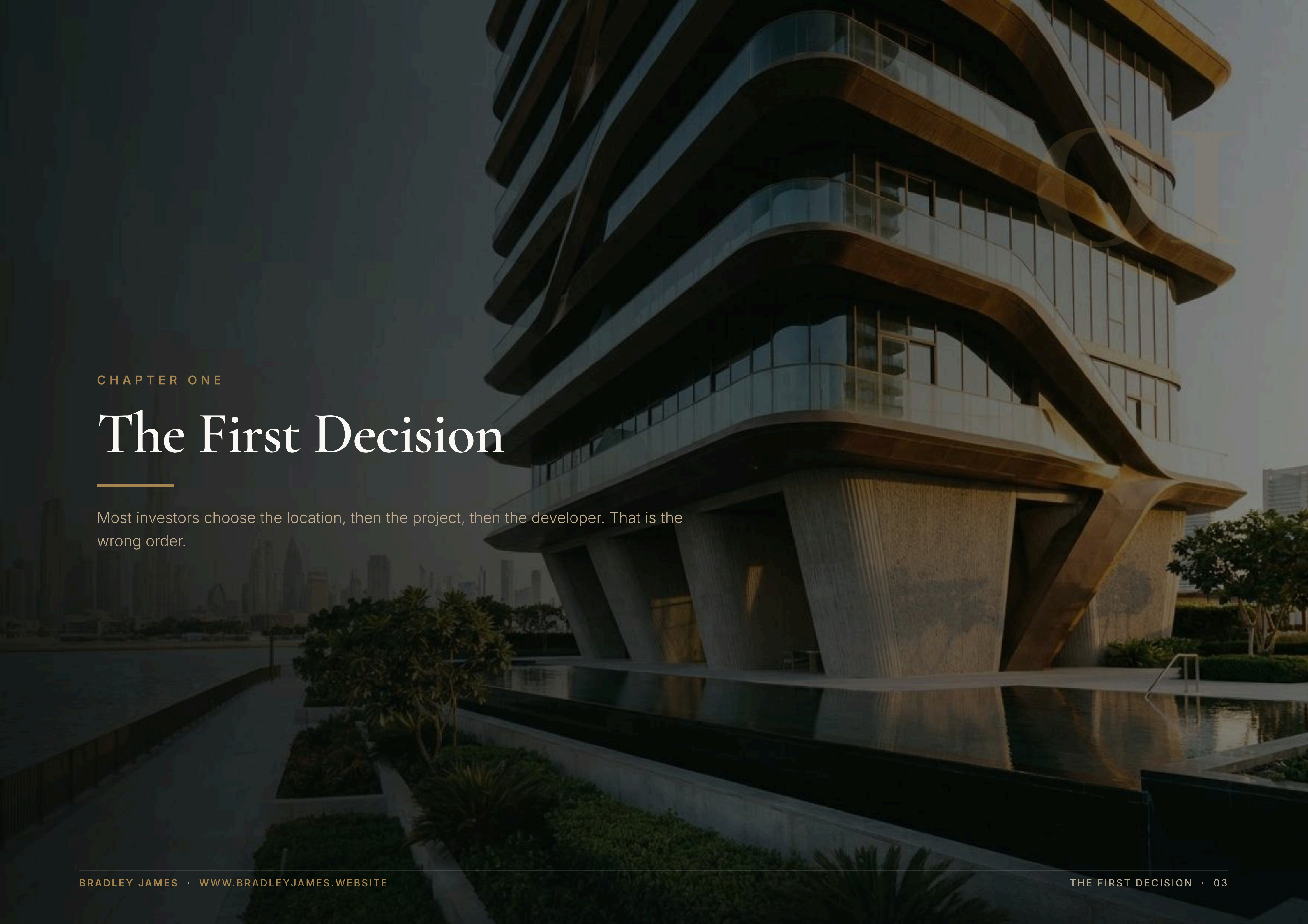
How to evaluate a Dubai developer before you commit capital.
Five criteria, three tiers, one decision that outranks the rest.

Bradley James
INVESTMENT ADVISOR · M&M REAL ESTATE, DUBAI

INSTITUTIONAL REPORT
2026 EDITION

CONTENTS

What This Guide Covers



CHAPTER ONE

The First Decision

Most investors choose the location, then the project, then the developer. That is the wrong order.

Why the Developer Comes First

Most overseas investors start by choosing a location, then a project, then a unit, and treat the developer as a follow-on check once they have already fallen for the renders. That is the wrong order.

Who builds your building decides almost everything that happens after you pay: whether it is delivered on time, how well it is finished, how it is maintained, and how easily you can sell it later. Escrow protects your money while the tower rises. It does not protect your time, your finish quality or your exit. Only the right developer does that.

So the developer is not the last box to tick. It is the first decision, and it quietly sets the ceiling on your return before you have even looked at a floor plan. This guide gives you the framework professionals use to make that decision deliberately.

◆ AT A GLANCE

- The developer sets your delivery date, your finish, your service and your exit.
- Escrow guards your capital, not your timeline or your resale price.
- Tier-1 delivery records and secondary demand are public and checkable.
- The cheapest entry price is often the most expensive decision over a full hold.
- Every criterion here you can verify before you commit a dirham.

◆ THE POINT

"Choose the developer first, and the project, the price and the exit all get easier. Choose them first and the developer last, and you inherit whatever you are given."

02

CHAPTER TWO

The Words First

A handful of terms carry every developer conversation. Here they are in plain English.

CHAPTER 02 · PLAIN ENGLISH

The Language of Developer Quality

You cannot grade a developer on criteria you cannot name. These are the terms that carry the whole assessment, each explained the way a friend in the industry would put it.

◆ TIER 1, 2 AND 3

An informal grading of developers by track record, finish and brand strength. Tier-1 names have long, documented delivery histories; Tier-3 are newer or thinner, with more variable outcomes.

◆ SNAGGING

The inspection at handover that lists defects the developer must fix. A short snag list signals discipline; a long one signals a build rushed or run cheap.

◆ DEFECT LIABILITY

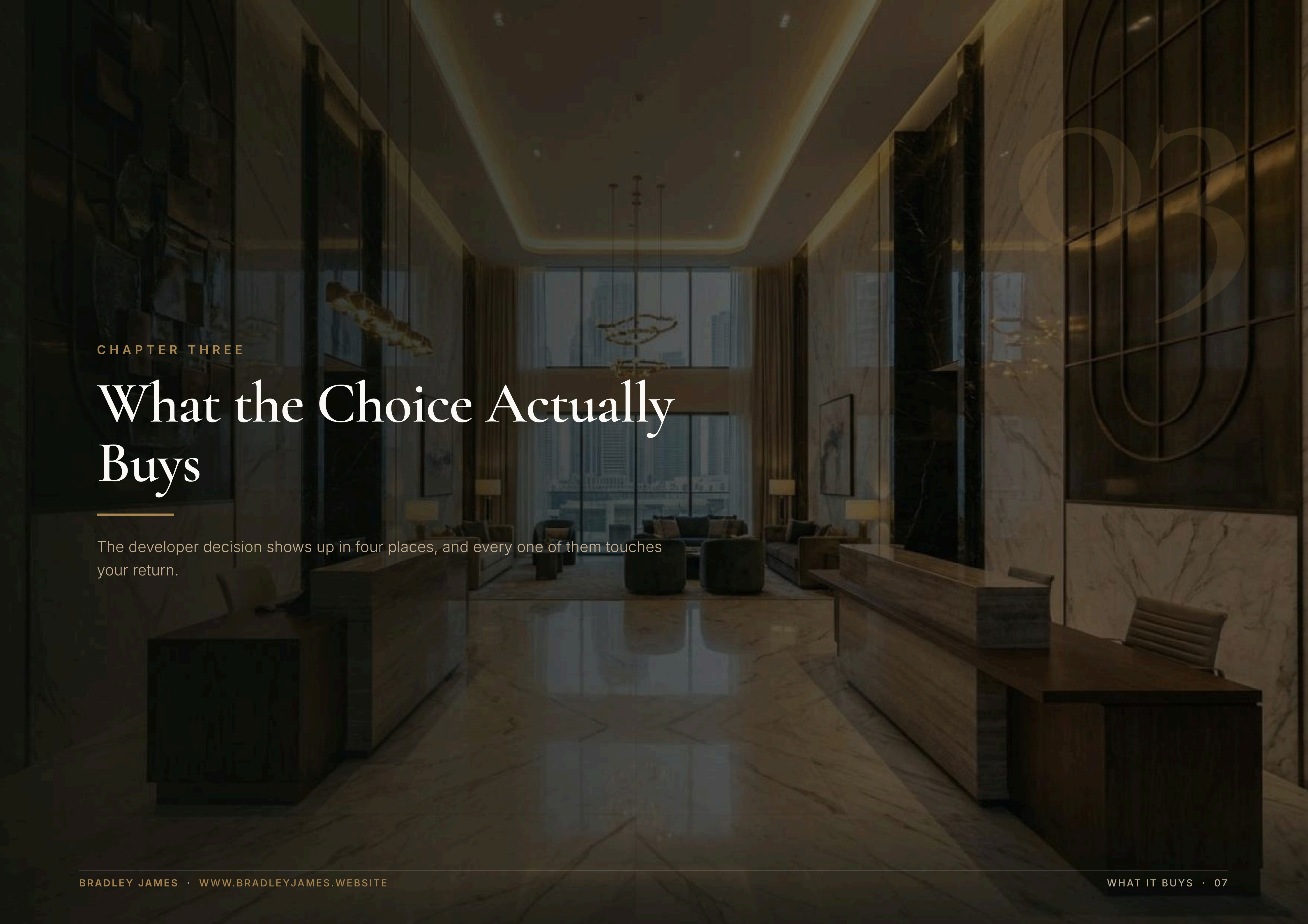
The period after handover in which the developer must fix faults. Under UAE law a 10-year decennial liability covers major structural defects, with a shorter window, typically a year, for minor and mechanical items.

◆ SECONDARY-MARKET DEPTH

How readily a developer's units resell, and at what premium. Deep secondary demand is your exit liquidity, and it is visible in the DLD transaction record.

◆ ESCROW COMPLIANCE

Whether the project has a dedicated, RERA-registered escrow account. It is the first, non-negotiable filter: no registered account, no deal.



03

CHAPTER THREE

What the Choice Actually Buys

The developer decision shows up in four places, and every one of them touches your return.

Where the Difference Actually Shows Up

The gap between a strong developer and a weak one is not abstract. It shows up in four concrete places, and each one feeds directly into your yield or your resale price. The figures below are directional patterns, not guarantees, but the direction is consistent.

FRONT	WHAT VARIES	WHY IT HITS YOUR RETURN
Handover risk	Weaker developers can slip well beyond contracted dates	Escrow protects the money, not the lost months of rent
Finish quality	Snag lists run short on Tier-1, long on Tier-3	Finish drives both the rental premium and the resale price
Resale depth	Strong brands resell faster and at a premium	Your exit liquidity depends on who built the building
Service standard	Tier-1 maintains to brand; weaker stock can slip in a few years	Poor upkeep compresses yield and resale at the same time

◆ THE COMPOUNDING POINT

These four do not act alone; they compound. A late, poorly finished, badly maintained building is hard to let and hard to sell at once. A well-run one earns and holds value simultaneously. Small quality gaps become large return gaps over a full hold.

04

CHAPTER FOUR

The Five Criteria

The scorecard itself. Five checks that grade any developer, each one you can run yourself.

The Five Ways to Grade a Developer

Here is the scorecard. Run a developer through these five and you will know far more than the brochure will ever tell you. Each is public or knowable before you commit.

1. **Handover track record.**
How many projects delivered, on time or late, and how late on average? Registration and project data sit with RERA. A long, documented record is the single best predictor of delivery.

2. **Snagging quality.**
Talk to buyers who have taken handover from this developer. Owner communities and independent snagging firms reveal the real finish quality behind the renders.

3. **Escrow compliance.**
Verify the project's RERA-registered escrow account before anything else. Every legitimate off-plan project has one. No registration, no proceed.

4. **Post-handover service.**
Does the developer honour defect claims within the liability period? Responsiveness here separates the brand-builders from those who disappear after handover.

5. **Resale liquidity.**
Check the DLD secondary record for the developer's existing buildings. Frequent resale at a premium signals genuine, durable demand.

◆ HOW TO SCORE IT

You do not need a spreadsheet. Rate each of the five as green, amber or red. A developer that is green on escrow and track record but amber on service is a different proposition from one that is red on delivery. The pattern tells you where the real risk sits.

05

CHAPTER FIVE

The Real Cost of the Wrong Tier

The cheaper entry price is often the more expensive decision. Here is that trap, in numbers.

CHAPTER 05 · ILLUSTRATIVE MODEL

When the Entry Discount Is a Trap

The premium a Tier-1 developer charges over a comparable Tier-3 unit is real, and investors focused only on entry price choose the discount. But the discount is paid back, with interest, over the hold. The model below is illustrative, two broadly comparable units under stated assumptions, not a forecast, but the shape is what matters.

MEASURE	TIER 1	TIER 3
Entry price (600 sqft)	AED 1.50M	AED 1.20M
Assumed gross yield	8.2%	6.1%
7-year rental income	AED 861k	AED 513k
Illustrative exit value	AED 3.15M	AED 1.94M
Total 7-year return	167%	105%

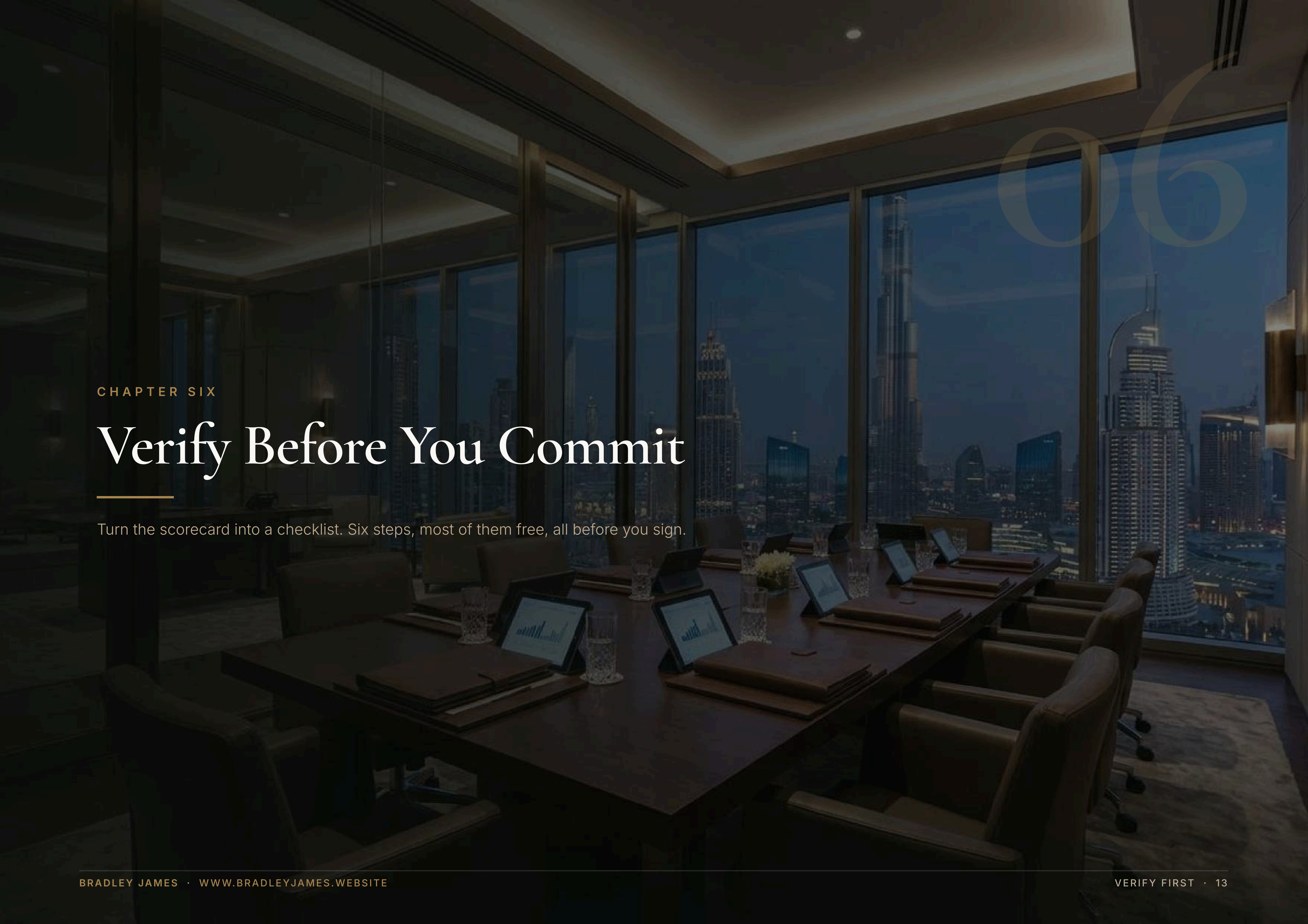
Illustrative only. Two broadly comparable units under stated assumptions; figures are rounded and are not a forecast of any specific project.

◆ READ THE TRAP

On this illustration the AED 300,000 saved at entry costs the buyer far more than that in total return over seven years. The entry discount looked like the saving. Tier selection was the actual investment decision.

◆ TAKEAWAY

"Buy the exit, not the entry. The cheapest unit to get into is often the most expensive one to have owned."



06

CHAPTER SIX

Verify Before You Commit

Turn the scorecard into a checklist. Six steps, most of them free, all before you sign.

CHAPTER 06 · DUE DILIGENCE

How to Verify Before You Commit

The scorecard only protects you if you act on it. Here is the practical routine, most of it free and available on the Dubai REST app, and the one piece of it worth paying a professional for.

1. **Verify the RERA licence.**
   On Dubai REST or the RERA site, confirm the developer's licence is active and matches the project type. A suspended licence is a hard stop.
2. **Confirm escrow registration.**
   Every off-plan project must have a dedicated RERA-registered escrow account. Verify it on the DLD portal, and pay only into that account.
3. **Research the delivery history.**
   Search the developer with 'handover review', and ask for direct references from buyers who took handover in the last couple of years.
4. **Check the DLD secondary data.**
   Look at resale transactions for the developer's existing buildings. Frequent resale at a premium confirms real demand.
5. **Have a lawyer read the SPA.**
   Handover date, force majeure, defect liability, milestone schedule and cancellation terms all matter. A few thousand dirhams here is money very well spent.

◆ RED FLAGS

- No RERA-registered escrow account, or pressure to pay 'directly'.
- A suspended or mismatched developer licence.
- No completed projects you can visit or verify.
- An SPA with a vague handover date or a wide force-majeure clause.

07

CHAPTER SEVEN

Straight Answers

The questions investors actually ask about developers, answered plainly, plus the points to keep.

CHAPTER 07 · FAQ

The Questions Investors Actually Ask

Q. Is a Tier-1 developer always worth the premium?

Not automatically, but usually where you plan to hold and later resell. The premium buys delivery reliability, finish, service and exit liquidity. If those matter to your plan, and for most investors they do, the premium tends to pay for itself over a full hold. Judge it case by case, not as a rule.

Q. How do I actually check a developer's track record?

Registration and project data sit with RERA and the DLD, accessible through the Dubai REST app. Combine that with owner-community reviews and direct references from recent buyers. The official record plus real buyer experience is a far better guide than any brochure.

Q. What protection do I have if defects appear after handover?

UAE law provides a 10-year decennial liability for major structural defects, with a shorter window, typically a year, for minor and mechanical items. A credible developer honours these claims; checking whether they respond is one of the five criteria for a reason.

Q. Can a strong developer fail to deliver on time anyway?

Timelines can slip for anyone, which is why escrow and milestone payments exist. But a long, documented delivery record is the best available predictor that a developer will deliver, and roughly when. Track record is not a guarantee; it is the odds in your favour.

Q. Does the developer affect my resale, or just the building?

Both, and they are linked. A strong brand resells faster and at a premium because buyers trust the build and the service. Your future exit liquidity is, in large part, a decision you make today when you choose who built the tower.

Q. Where do the return figures in this guide come from?

The tier comparison is an illustrative model under stated assumptions, not a forecast of any specific project. It exists to show the shape of the entry-discount trap. Your real numbers depend on the actual unit, area and developer, which is exactly what a proper assessment works out.

CHAPTER 07 · REMEMBER THIS

The Five Points to Keep

If you take nothing else from this guide, take these five. They turn 'which developer?' from a gut call into a graded decision.

1. **The developer is the first decision, not the last.**
   It sets your delivery, finish, service and exit before you pick a unit.
2. **Escrow guards the money, the developer guards the rest.**
   Time, quality and resale are the developer's to make or break.
3. **Grade every developer on the five criteria.**
   Track record, snagging, escrow, service and resale depth, each checkable.
4. **Buy the exit, not the entry.**
   The cheapest unit to enter is often the most expensive to have owned.
5. **Verify before you commit.**
   Licence, escrow, history, secondary data and the SPA, all before you sign.

REFERENCES & SOURCES

Every Figure, Sourced

Every statistic in this guide is attributed. Where sources differ, a range is used. Links are live and clickable.

01 **RERA / Dubai Land Department: developer and project registration, escrow account verification**. Dubai Land Department. https://dubailand.gov.ae/en/about-us/real-estate-regulatory-agency/

02 **Dubai REST app: verify developer licences, project registration and escrow status**. Dubai Land Department. https://dubailand.gov.ae/en/eservices/dubai-rest/

03 **DLD transaction records: secondary-market resale prices and volumes by building**. Dubai Land Department. https://dubailand.gov.ae/en/

04 **UAE Civil Code: 10-year decennial liability of contractors and developers for structural defects**. UAE Federal Legislation. https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/housing

05 **Off-plan escrow requirement: Dubai Law No. 8 of 2007 (dedicated project escrow accounts)**. Government of Dubai (Legislation). https://dlp.dubai.gov.ae/

WORK WITH BRADLEY JAMES

Developer Selection Is Not Something to Do Alone.

◆ ABOUT BRADLEY

Not a broker, an advisor. I built a business in the UK and spent more than a decade advising people from all walks of life, before moving to Dubai and joining M&M Real Estate to work at a higher strategic level than the typical transactional broker. I specialise exclusively in off-plan investment for overseas and high-net-worth clients, I put my own capital into the projects I recommend, and my business is more than 80% referral-driven, because every client came through someone who trusted me first.

WHATSAPP
+971 56 500 6162

EMAIL
b.james@mandmrealestate.ae

WEBSITE
www.bradleyjames.website

Bradley James

INVESTMENT ADVISOR · M&M REAL ESTATE · DUBAI