Breakdown for One-Shots

The players arrive; I explain the game a bit (no rules yet). I handout playbooks.

*Players **do not** build characters ahead of time, ever. As the players are looking through the various playbooks, I explain the rules very briefly (they'll learn how to play as we go); basically the 2d6 6/7-9/10+ mechanic and how "moves" work (usually Hack & Slash and Defy Danger).*

Since I don't know their character names yet, I address them by class - once I know their PC names, I (and the players) will only address them by those names.

Then, I ask questions. Leading ones, at that - "Ranger, how did the Druid guide you to safety while hunting in foreign lands?" or "Cleric, during what battle were you on the opposite side of the Paladin?" etc. If the players don't like the leading questions, I make it clear we can change what I've said; I'm just trying to give them ideas!

I provide index cards to each of the players, and ask them to create a tent with their character name, race/background and playbook written on it, facing the rest of the table. I continue asking questions as concepts are raised. Say a player declares herself to be an Elf. I ask: are Elves common in this world? How do other races feel about them? Are they like Tolkien described, or something completely different? I do this with literally anything the players (or I) bring up - and I continue doing this throughout the game.

Once they've settled on playbooks, I ask them to draw a map. I hand out 1-2 index cards (I have hex shaped ones, now!) and ask them to draw something fantastical on them; either a topographical feature (mountain region) or a feature of civilization; it doesn't matter what. I provide permanent markers, of course. I also have a stack of these from previous games to pull from! Here is an album I made of some of the games!

*I then choose three of the index cards and lay them down in the middle of the table. They aren't touching; there is space between them. I pick one that feels appropriate (an image of a dark forest, the city docks, a mountain cave) and mentally designate it as the starting point of the adventure, based on what I've heard so far. What's awesome (and frequently garners gasps from the players) is that halfway through a session, I just might move the index cards apart and insert a **brand new** index card, either from the pile or that I've just drawn. I'm an awful artist so it's usually the former. This of course should only happen naturally, when the fiction calls for a new locale.*

If I haven't generated a cool starting scenario yet, I check my handy "inspirations for opening scenes" in the Syllabus and pick one at random. It's OK if you have nothing planned yet, it will all unfold naturally, trust me. I then describe the scene to them, for example:

"You're in the middle of the street. There's a carriage overturned nearby and two dead horses. Someone is bleeding to death nearby; who are they? Four bowmen are shooting arrows at you; they obviously want you dead. You have taken shelter behind the carriage, but it has just begun to erupt in flames."

I might gussy it up a bit with flavor from the shared world we've been creating, and I might remove or add more questions. But that's the gist of my opening line. Finally, I put the ball in their court with this simple phrase:

"What do you do?"

And then we begin.

Alternate map-making method:

Set out a blank sheet of paper, and ask the player who is the most well-traveled — likely the Ranger or Druid — to draw a rough outline of the region. Then, ask the most social character — probably the Bard, Paladin, or Thief — to draw a point of interest they've heard rumors about. Finally, ask the most knowledgeable character —either the Wizard or the Cleric — to draw roads, rivers, forests, mountain ranges, etc. If anyone hasn't drawn something on the map yes, they should then add a detail of their choice. The map should still be mostly empty; with places to explore! As each player adds their details to the map, ask them what they know about them! You can also ask the appropriate character (for instance, a Thief might know the name of the capital city's slums), the history behind a ruin, who rules the Emerald Forest, etc. As you talk, you should jot this information down for later use. Always remember to **leave blanks**!

Resources

[Things to do in the first session](#)
[First Session Cheat Sheet Card](#) + [Index Card Version](#)
[Inspiration for Opening Scenes](#) & [Questions to Ask](#)
[The Inexhaustive List of Dungeon World Questions](#)