Rules Notes

For those interested in a more in-depth look at the rules I use, here you go.

The specific books that I draw my rules from are:

Original D&D 3-book set:
     Men & Magic
     Monsters & Treasure
     The Underworld & Wilderness Adventures
Grayhawk (Supplement I)
Blackmoor (Supplement II)
Eldritch Wizardry (Supplement III)
Gods, Demigods, and Heroes (Supplement IV)
Chainmail
Swords and Spells

I also supplement these with material from the following:
Other D&D Rulesets (BD&D, AD&D1/2/2.5, D&D3/3.5, etc.)
Runequest
The Arduin Grimoire
Welcome to Skull Tower (Arduin Grimoire II)
The Runes of Doom (Arduin Grimoire III)
The Call of Cthulhu
Gamma World
Metamorphosis Alpha
Perilous Encounters
Judge's Guild Stuff, both D&D and Runequest
The Dragon Magazine (in its various incarnations)
White Dwarf Magazine
Space Gamer Magazine
Some Late Nights Working the Cash Register at 7-Eleven During Full Moons
Hallucinations While Working 96-hour Weeks at Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Project
Odd Experiences While Testing Rocket Engines
And Anything Else That Crosses My Path

Literary Influences
While these are hardly "rules", they affect the way I see the game, and they may be useful to you. At any rate they're all good reads:
The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings by J.R.R. Tolkien (of course.)

The Silmarilion and Lost Tales of Middle Earth by J.R.R.
and Christopher Tolkien
By Jack Vance:
    The Dying Earth
    Eyes of the Overworld
    Cugel's Saga
    Rhialto the Marvellous
    Lyonesse
    The Green Pearl
    Madouc
    Absolutely Anything by Jack Vance
The Practice Effect by David Brin
The Conan stories by Robert E. Howard and Lin Carter
The Dragon and the George by Gordon Dickson
The Diskworld series by Terry Pratchett
Heaps of other stuff. Ask me what I'm reading lately.

In terms of the magazines listed above, I draw most heavily
on the issues that were current with the original D&D
rules. This was a period of unbridled creativity when we
had better things to do than fight over whether Gygax was
God or whether you're "not playing real D&D" if your dwar-
ven women lack beards. I use several character classes from
articles in The Dragon, for example.

The Purpose of the Rules

The rules provide a means of keeping me from just making it
all up as I go along and potentially railroading the play-
ers into just being passive participants in my narrative,
and they also provide a controlled means for the players to
do what they want to do without riding roughshod over the
world. The idea is to provide a rapid means of resolving
conflicts in the game and providing a rational mechanism
for controlling and distributing power to the players and
the NPCs.

The Class System, Combat Rules, and Items Forbidden by
Class

Yes, class-based systems suck compared to skills-based sys-
tems, until you try to actually play the skills-based sys-
tems. The problem is that skills-based systems become very
complex very rapidly, and they tend to take longer to use
when resolving game issues (like combat or a use of a skill
in a particular instance.)

Class-based systems tend to have a lot of apparently arbitrary rules on the other hand, such as no swords for Wizards. Where would Gandalf have been without Glamdring, after all? But class-based systems do tend to work well while being very simple (it's perfectly possible to make them as complex and unwieldy as skills-based systems, while it is possible to add as many arbitrary rules to a skills-based system as are found in a class-based system.) They provide a simple framework for distributing capabilities and power between players, and for resolving conflicts rapidly.

The idea is to identify roughly the areas that each character has abilities. Restrictions are in place to give each class a specific, special role in the game while preventing overpowered do-everything characters (which are at least as unrealistic as the restrictions placed on classes. Nobody has the time and energy to be best at _everything_.)

Simple combat resolution techniques are used to give a reasonable outcome to combat while preserving the flow of the game narrative. The purpose is not to exhaustively model every aspect of combat. Attempting to do so results in an overly complex system that takes time away from the story we're weaving.

It's enough to know that you're likely to give someone a lot more hurt with a three-foot long piece of steel than with a foot-long piece. And it's easier to kill someone who's just off the farm than someone who's been living on a sword's edge for several years. And you've got a better chance of killing someone wearing just their skin than someone wrapped in steel. Anything more complicated is superfluous unless you're playing a true wargame, which this isn't.

In my campaign, I interpret the "shall not use" rules somewhat leniently. It is my firm belief that if a footpad launches himself at a wizard, and the only weapon that comes to hand for that wizard is a sword, that the wizard will take up the sword and do his best to separate the attacker from his life with that sword. It is also my conviction that if a wizard spends a bunch of time training in the use of physical weapons substantially more complex in their use than kitchen knives and baseball bats, that their magic abilities will suffer.

Hence I provide the following interpretations:
Characters may use weapons that are "forbidden" to their
class, however they gain no experience for any results of
such use, and they will only be able to use those items
with the ability of a first-level character of their own
class using an allowed weapon. If a weapon is used that
violates a principle for the class (such as a cleric using
an edged weapon, when their religion disallows it), there
will be an experience loss equal to at least whatever expe-
rience would have been gained through the use of an allowed
weapon. Further losses may result depending on circum-
stances (like if the Bishop sees you do it.) But don't for-
get, a little dishonor and XP loss sure beats death.

Characters may wear armor "forbidden" to their class, but
they may not engage in any activities (such as spell-
casting) that are not natural to a character of a type that
wears the armor. For example, a mage wearing armor cannot
cast spells. A cleric wearing paladin-only armor could only
cast spells that a paladin of a level equal to their own
could cast. Note that I consider clerical spell-casting and
magical spell-casting to be two entirely different things,
so "spell-casting" allowed on the part of a cleric while
wearing some armor does not confer the ability for the mage
to do "spell-casting" of their sort while wearing the ar-
mor.

Characters may own, wear, or carry items "forbidden" to
their class, but the items will have no special qualities
for them. The Staff of Fireball is nothing more than a
stick in the hands of a fighter. The Holy Armor of Might is
just dead weight metal on the back of a mage. Such items
may also result in the loss of some abilities where this
makes sense.

Be aware that in my campaign there are items that class-
specific or class-inspecific that would otherwise be "for-
bidden" to certain classes. For example, if I had Glamdring
in my campaign it would be a special sword that allows a
mage to wield it (as an allowed weapon, giving experience,
etc.), in addition to its other magical abilities, while
retaining its damage and other characteristics. I don't
have Glamdring in my campaign, but I have other items along
these lines. An "identify", competently performed, will
turn up these attributes, as will copious experimentation.

Hit Points

First level characters start with the max hit points for a
die their class, because having only 1 hit point sucks so
much there's no fun in including such a possibility in the
game. It isn't worth taking the time to name a soap-bubble
character, much less rolling them up and spending valuable
game time waiting for them to die when the first successful
hit roll comes.

Hit points suck, just like classes. But they work in a game
sense, so long as they are used intelligently.

The classic stupidity associated with hit points is that it
would take several hundred strokes with a dagger to kill a
high level character laying face-down and senseless on the
pavement in their skivvies with the attacker crouching over
their unprotected back. This does not happen in my cam-
paign.

Hit points are only in part a measure of your physical
ability to take damage, the thing they are usually most
closely associated with. Most importantly, they are a meas-
ure of your ability to reduce and mitigate the damage you
do take when you are active and conscious and able to do
something about what your opponent is trying to do to you.

It's your ability to move and take the arrow through some
part of your body less critical than your heart or your
brain. It's your ability to tip your head as your oppo-
nent's sword comes over the top of your shield and lose
your ear and a patch of scalp instead of the top two inches
of your head. It's your ability to absorb some of the force
of the blow rather than taking the full brunt of its force
stiff-legged. This ability grows with experience, so your
hit points grow with experience.

If you're tied up and the priest is dropping the dagger
into your heart, your hit points won't save you. He won't
have to strike again and again rolling 1D4 each time until
he reaches your hit point total. The dagger will fall and
you will take mortal damage - bang - just like that. If you
are passed out drunk in the street and a footpad decides he
wants to cut your throat, you hit points won't matter. One

stroke of the knife and you'll be seriously dead unless something else happens to stop it almost immediately.

Not only does your HP total not matter, all those "to hit" die rolls don't happen either, because they depend on you being an active participant rather than a piece of meat on a slab. If rational physics allows the blade (or spell, or stone) to damage you in a fatal fashion, that's what will happen—if the attacker desires it and has the ability to do so.

Note the last caveat. If, for example, a member of some race other than your own wanted to kill you out of hand, they would do so to the best of their understanding. If that happened to be stabbing you in the calf, then you're not insta-dead, just bleeding. Or if some know-nothing miscreant puts his shiv into your lung instead of your heart, you're just bleeding, not dead. The situation will be serious, but not instantly fatal. I will determine how much of your vitality you will lose over time based on the wound you receive. Then you can scream at your fellow players out of character to go find your bleeding body for the five minutes to two hours of game time you have left until your character gives up the ghost (or if you're lucky, you'll get the chance to take care of yourself or drag yourself somewhere.) There's also the possibility that some malicious but under-informed Babylonian Goddess (or God, depending on your character's predilections) will think that a thorough Swedish Massage is fatal for your kind. You could only hope.

In a strictly game sense, we like our hit points to grow because we like to see progression in our characters as we play them. More hit points allows us to be more foolhardy and take on bigger challenges. Our other abilities grow as well, but chances are we won't survive to get much use out of them if we are forced to run our characters around with only one die of hit points.