Torch Text

Mambrum
Emb wan woma im suti gum belsar
Emb bren woma im suti tumbatar
Emb wan woma im suti gum belsar
Emb ho woma im suti tumbatar

Wamba Liba
Emb ho engi gum wur
Ahon gum irur
Safropa, emb ho bilfen safer guró
Bilfen sal imo
Safer wan bendo
Emb ho woma im suti tumbatar

Wamba Wera
Emb de bombwes bli
Bomba ewarni
Holumumb pin bomba emeri lem
Emeri suti
Beralumb rofi
Gwéro emb ho suti tumbatar

Wamba Erend
Pin wan bilfen emb
De sefro esefem
Wohiró defangore de bilfen
Safer wan belsar
Fangi tumbatar
Gor isrend, sal wan bilfen mopiró emb

Wamba Onda
Emb de suti wur
De mopimo irur
Bibi lem wan sefro mopiró emb
Pin wan sefro gum
Ho neri egelum
Emb wan woma im suti belsar, emund

Wamba Dlir
Emb de durndi gum
Ho neri egelum
Emb bren woma im suti tumbatar
Alfor gum ebomi
Ho woma im suti
Emb wan woma im suti belsar, emund

Wamba Twar
Ho ismendo wur gum
Ho nodlimo pinumb
Pin wan sefro mopiró emb gwehar
Emb de suti gum
Rum neri egelum
Suwi safropwa, emb ho deli saler

Tallfellow Overview

Tallfellow is a language spoken by halflings that inhabit the Patchwork in the world of Dombellus, a homebrew D&D setting. Their language is designed to sound and feel "familiar" to an (American) English speaker, since Tolkien's hobbit characters tend to stand in for the reader in his fantasy setting, and so translating it should be relatively straightforward.

The text above is a *warmbwem*, a simple and popular halfling song form which consists of a *mambrum* or chorus (four phrases with five beats each) alternating with several *ewamba* or verses (two phrases with three beats, then one with five, and then the pattern repeats once).

Tallfellow romanization is at least IPA-adjacent, but for pronunciation purposes note that *r* = /ɹ/; *e* = /ɛ/; *u* = /ʌ/ (/u/ is absent from the language); *o* = /oʊ/; *mb*, *nd* and *ng* are prenasalized stops; and *p* and *t* are always aspirated. Often, unstressed vowels will be dropped next to other vowels across word boundaries; this is especially common with initial, unstressed /ɛ/. Final consonants followed by /h/ commonly mutate into aspirated stops, including across word boundaries, e.g. *emb ho* /ˈɛm.pʰoʊ/.

Tallfellow has lexical stress, which is most commonly on the first syllable but may appear anywhere in a word. It is usually not written explicitly but is given in the vocabulary at the end by an acute accent, e.g. á. In cases where it is given explicitly in the text (also with acute accents), this means either that the word requires such a marking for disambiguation purposes (most commonly with the allative and ablative cases) or that it is a foreign word for which Tallfellow speakers will not know where the stress goes. For instance, my name might be written *Enrígi*.

Tallfellow uses SVO word order almost exclusively and is a nominative-accusative language (although only word order distinguishes subjects and objects). It is mostly head-initial, with adjectives and other modifiers typically following nouns or whatever they are modifying. Instrumental nouns immediately follow verbs. Adverbial phrases usually go at the end of the sentence, but locative, ablative and allative phrases are often shifted to the beginning to introduce a time or location, especially in existential constructions. Of course, in songs and poetry, such as this text, word order can be quite flexible.

Verb inflection is all but nonexistent in Tallfellow, with tense, aspect and mood being handled by particles preceding the verb or by adverbs. Nouns however have several forms of inflection, including five cases (nominative/accusative, genitive/instrumental, locative, ablative, allative). These are given below in the order they must be applied to a noun:

Plurals: Plurals are formed by prefixing *é-* to the beginning of a noun starting with a consonant, or *ér-* to one starting with a vowel. The accent mark means that the stress of the word is drawn onto the prefix added. (This effect is applied before adding any cases.) Adjectives do not have plural prefixes unless they are acting as substantive nouns; so *wúmbo* is "big", but *éwumbo* is "the big ones".

Genitive/Instrumental Case: This case is a genitive when following a noun and an instrumental when following a verb; so if *dígor* is "spear", *díglor* could mean either "of the spear" or "with the spear/by means of the spear" depending on word order. Note that the instrumental does not double as a comitative in Tallfellow.

The rules for forming the genitive/instrumental are somewhat complicated; in their simplest form, they involve infixing *l* directly before the final vowel in a noun, but phonological rules often forbid this, causing sound changes based on what the preceding consonant is as in the table below:

Preceding Consonant(s)	Genitive Affix	Nominative Example	Genitive Example
b, mb, d, nd, f, g, ng, s, none	Infix -l-	*bágin* "house"; *índ* "stairs"	*báglin* "of the house"; *línd* "of the stairs"
h, r, w (by itself or clustered with any of the consonants above)	Delete h/r/w, then infix -l-	*bláwi* "cat"; *wás* "cloud"	*bláli* "of the cat"; *lás* "of the cloud"
l, all adjectives and foreign words	Suffix -il, or -lil if ending in a vowel	*blún* "river"; *Enrígi* "Enrique"	*blúnil* "of the river"; *Enrígilil* "Enrique's"
m, n (by itself)	Infix -r-	*blawími* "kitten"	*blawímri* "of the kitten"
p, t	Infix -w-	*mépo* "close friend"	*mépwo* "close friend's"
fm, fn, sm, sn	Delete m/n, then infix -r-	*smálng* "dragon"	*srálng* "of the dragon"
mw, nw, mr, nr	Replace m/n with mb/nd, then infix -l-	*wímwo* "celebration"	*wímblo* "of the celebration"
pr, pw, tr, tw	Replace p/t with b/d, then infix -l-	*wotrí* "wizard"	*wodlí* "of the wizard"

Recognizing genitive forms is probably the most difficult part of translating Tallfellow, especially for words with only a single syllable.

Like Tallfellow's other cases, the genitive is very regular. Only pronouns are irregular, with unique possessive adjectives in place of genitive or instrumental forms (*bli* "my", *lem* "your", etc.). These decline like adjectives but are used anywhere a genitive or instrumental pronoun is needed as well.

Demonstratives: Tallfellow demonstratives are incorporated into the noun. Form them by suffixing -*(w)er* "this" or -*(r)um* "that", with the letters in parentheses being omitted after a consonant. There are no free demonstrative forms; instead, one must attach the demonstrative suffix to a third person pronoun.

Locative Case: The locative case is formed very simply by suffixing -*(r)umb* to nouns or -*(r)ung* to adjectives, omitting the *(r)* after consonants. It is used to indicate the location of something in space or time (at, in, by, near, etc.) or the background of motion (through, during, etc.) and can also function as a comitative (with [someone], etc.). When it appears at the beginning of a sentence that uses *úmbur* "be", it indicates an existential "there is" statement, which can stand in for possession or description of attributes (as in *Pinumb umbur wapum*, "I have an apple", lit. at me there is an apple).

Ablative and Allative Cases: The only difference between the ablative ("from, since, by") and the allative ("to, toward, until") is stress for most nouns, so they include explicit stress markings. To form these cases for both nouns and adjectives, add the suffix -*(r)o*, omitting the *(r)* after a consonant; then shift the word's stress onto the penultimate syllable (for the ablative) or onto the final -*o* (for the allative). If both occur in the same phrase, the ablative will come first (as in *gelwéno glibó*, "from the forest to the city").

Irregular locative, ablative, and allative forms exist, but do not appear in the text.

Vocabulary

áhon (verb) shout, scream, yell; cry, call (animals)

alfór (verb) stall, make stop, bring to a stop, brake, hold (a steed), keep still, hold still

bélsar (adverb) may, maybe, might, perhaps; hopefully, I hope that

béndo (verb) end, finish, complete; set (the sun); have dessert

béral (noun) tree

bíbi (noun) mother, mom, mama (associated with children)

bílfen (verb) hold, carry, bring; make into, cause to be (takes the allative); make (do something; connects another verb with *imo*)

bli (possessive adjective) my, mine

bómba (verb) see, understand

bómbwes (verb) pay attention to, notice; watch over, supervise

brén (particle) should, ought to, must

de (particle) marks progressive aspect, used for ongoing actions (as English -ing)

defángore (adjective) constantly, continually, all the time

déli (verb) fall onto, shower, rain on, precipitate on

dlír (adjective) five, fifth

dúrndi (verb) play (a game or pastime, not an instrument or role)

émb (pronoun) you (singular) (possessive adjective *lem*)

émund (noun) baby, infant, small child

engí (verb) laugh

érend (adjective) three, third

fángi (verb) go, travel

gél (noun) eye

gór (adjective) lacking, bereft, without (followed by a noun in the genitive case)

gúm (adverb) now

guró (adverb) away; follows a verb, usually directly

gwéhar (adverb) lie this, this way, as shown, like so, thusly, so much

gwéro (ablative adverb) next, then, thereupon, after that, thus, therefore

ho (particle) marks imperative mood, i.e. commands or exhortations

hól (noun) place

im (particle) marks verb as infinitive

imo (conjunction or preposition) so as to, in order to, for

irúr (conjunction) nor, and not

ísmend (noun) fear, terror, horror

ísmendo (verb) be afraid, be scared, be frightened, fear (object of fear takes the locative case)

líba (adjective) one; first (usually with plural nouns)

lém (possessive adjective) your (sg.), yours (sg.)

mámbrum (noun) chorus of a song

méri (noun) brother, sister, sibling, cousin; friend, ally

mópi (adjective) full (stomach), satisfied, satiated; sleepy, tired, drowsy

mópimo (verb) be satisfied, be full; be sleepy, be tired, be drowsy

néri (verb) cover, block, obscure, hide (transitive), keep (a secret)

nódlimo (verb) eat something delicious and comfortable, eat comfort food; pass the time idly, while away, laze about; relax

ondá (adjective) four, fourth

pín (pronoun) I, me (possessive adjective *blí*)

rófi (adjective) happy, glad, smiling, healthy, sunny, bright (of the sun)

rum (particle) marks past tense

sáfer (noun) sun

safrópa (noun) moon

sál (pronoun) he, she, they (sg.), it, him, her, them (sg.); stands in for anything animate, including all living creatures but not plants; note that celestial objects are often considered animate as well

séfem (noun) tune, melody, song

séfro (verb) sing, chant, recite poetry, play (wind instrument)

súti (verb) sleep

suwí (noun) light (illumination)

túmbatar (adverb) quickly, swiftly, speedily; suddenly, surprisingly; instantly, immediately; sharply (of turning or bending)

twár (adjective) six, sixth

wambá (noun) pie filling; verse in a song

wan (particle) marks future tense

wárni (noun) word, speech

werá (adjective) two, second

wóhi (adjective) safe, secure, protected

wóma (verb) begin, start, found, establish, serve food

wur (adverb) no, not