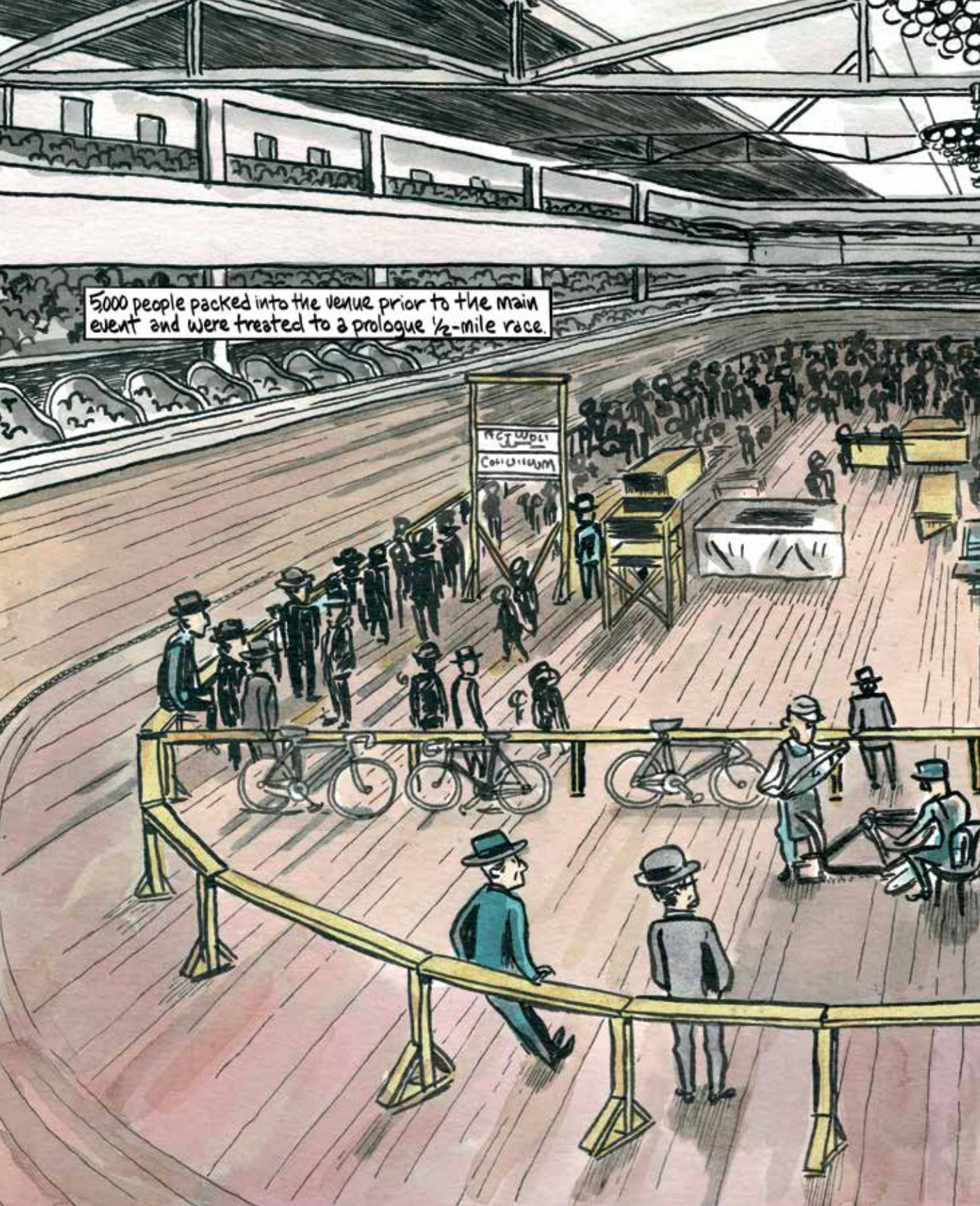
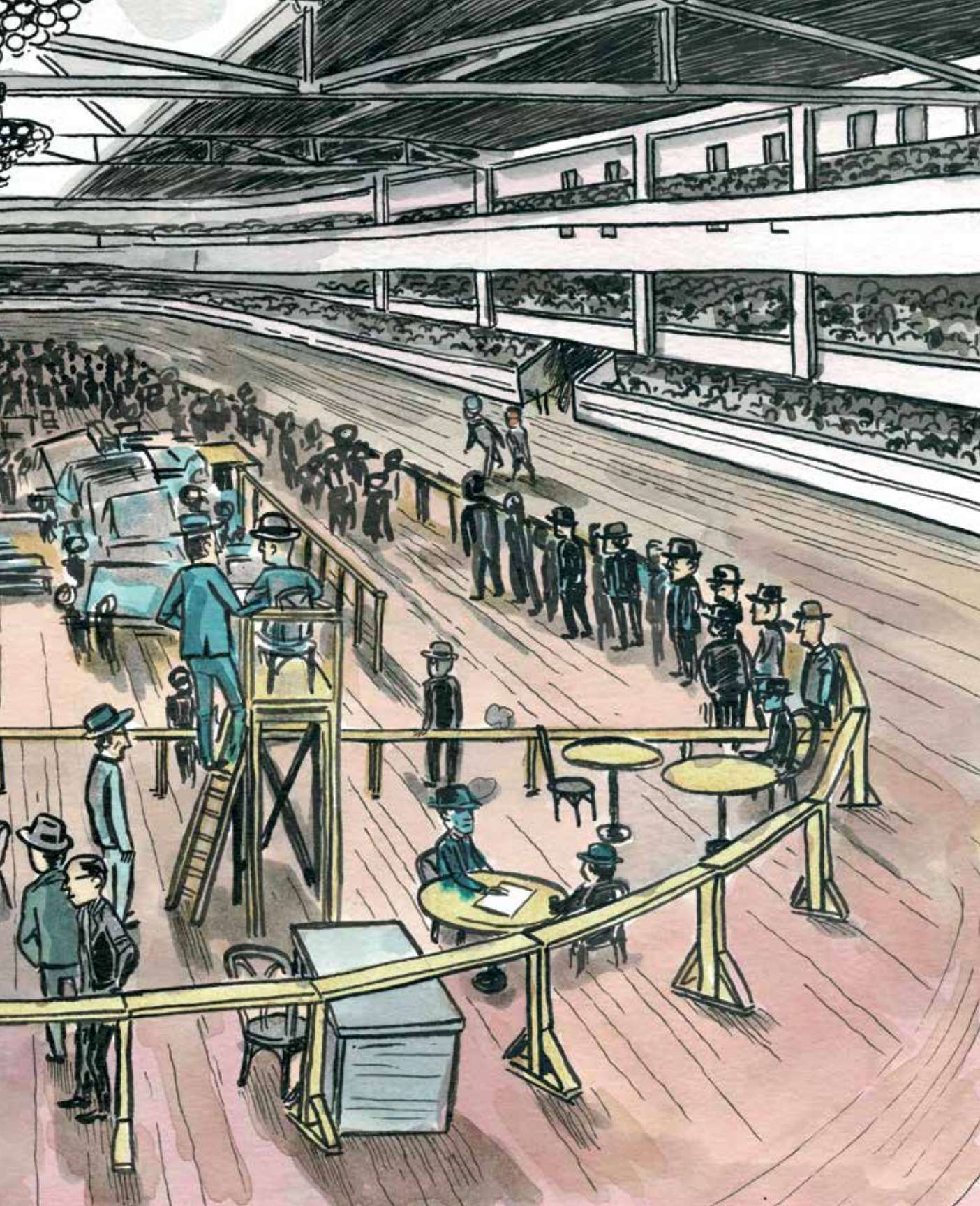


Madison Square Garden,
Saturday, December 5,
1896



5000 people packed into the venue prior to the main event and were treated to a prologue 1/2-mile race.







From the pistol's crack, Major Taylor set a blistering pace.

Too fast, the other riders surmised, to continue for a half mile. They decided to wait him out.

ON YOUR RIGHT!

RIDER ON YOUR RIGHT!

Bald the contest's star rider, saw something worrying in this newcomer's form. He had a speed, grace, and efficiency that belied his youth and inexperience.

He had to rein him in.
He was "The Cannon" after all.



He closed the gap with ease.



BULLY!

He's giving the old boys the business!

Cannon Bald will catch him!

The race's sponsors were pleased.



The crowd whipped itself into a FRENZY.



The rest of the field fell away.

This was a two-man race.

Bald put on the heat, but Major held his own until the finish.

Major pulled out of his tuck, both delighted and surprised he'd won.



The crowd was going wild.

They chanted in unison.

But what were they saying?



He couldn't quite make it out.

"No?"

"FOE?"

"ROW?"

"GO!"

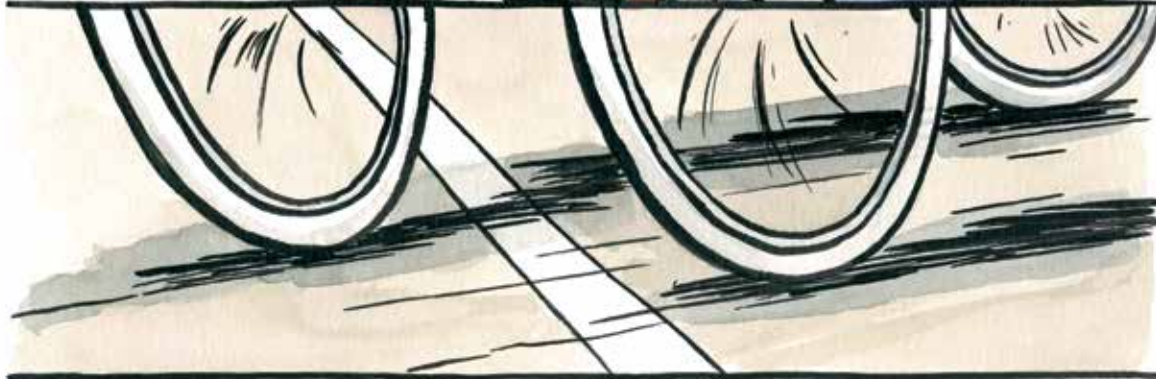
He had counted!
There was still one
lap to go!



Taylor could hear the whir and
grind of chains and cogs at
his wheel.



The graceful dance he'd previously
done gave way to brute mashing
and wrestling as he desperately
clung to his lead.



He managed to hold on and won an auspicious achievement for his professional debut.



The crowd went wild!

Not everyone was as exuberant.

EDDIE
MURPHY



A word please. For the readers -- your fans.

My fans?

They'll all be saying that I'm the only crackerjack in the game what'd let a N#e#r# beat him..

Taylor's prize for the race, his first cash winnings, was \$200. This was the equivalent of five months' salary for the average worker in that day.

He left immediately, walking to the nearest Western Union to wire the money to his mother.



There he is.

Let's go.



Marshall!

Uh-- MASHOR!



Taylor braced himself. This was a different time, but it was still New York.





Monday, just past midnight, the Six-Day Race began. This was an international event, with 30 of the best riders from France, Germany, Ireland, England, and Wales in the ranks. Each took a ceremonial lap while the band played a song from their country.

"The Bluebells of Scotland"

"Rule, Britannia!"

For the American riders, "Yankee Doodle" gave way to "Swanee River" when Major Taylor rolled out.

"Longing for the old plantation"

"Oh, darkeys, how my heart grows weary..."



The riders took their places for the official start of the race.



The guest of honor, firing the starter's pistol, was none other than Eddie "Cannon" Bald. He was a sprinter, not a distance rider, so this wasn't his kind of race.



Seeing Major again, he probably wished the pistol had at least one live round.



And so began six days of madness.

Grun Grn



Major set out to prove himself early, challenging the field to a sprint.



The more experienced riders held back, saving their legs for the week-long effort.

Passing on your left.



Save it for SATURDAY, Kid...



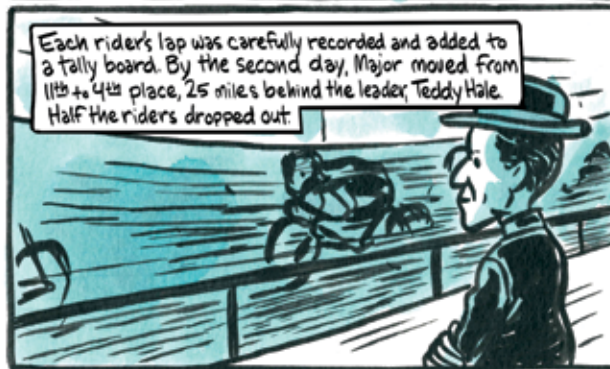
To their amazement, hours later he was still at it, repeatedly lapping the field.

The track's infield was a hive of activity. There were tents for cat naps. Major adorned his with a horseshoe for good luck. The press, in another a litany of racist barbs, referred to it as his "voodoo charm."

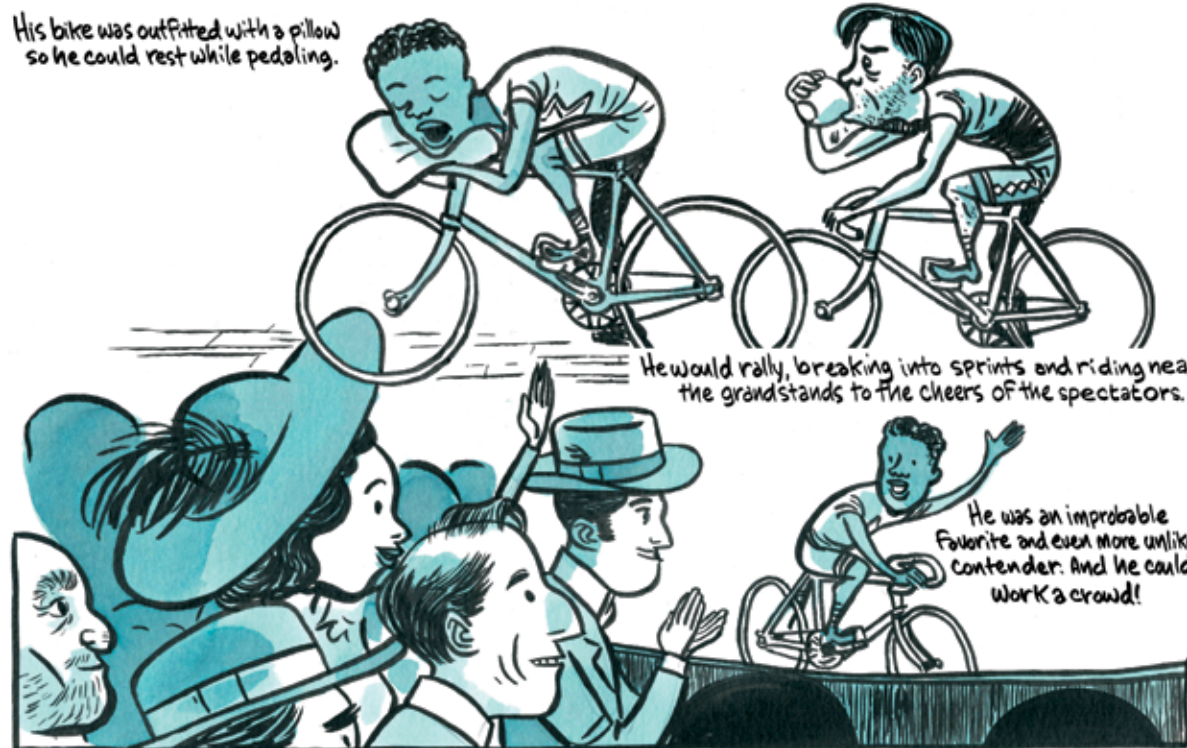


There were cots for massage and medical attention. Cooking stations were attended by each rider's trainer. Like behind the front line of a war zone.

Each rider's lap was carefully recorded and added to a tally board. By the second day, Major moved from 11th to 4th place, 25 miles behind the leader, Teddy Hale. Half the riders dropped out.



In its daily update, "The Eagle" described Major as "the fastest looking man on the track."



But the strain was showing.

He couldn't keep up with his energy needs and looked gaunt.

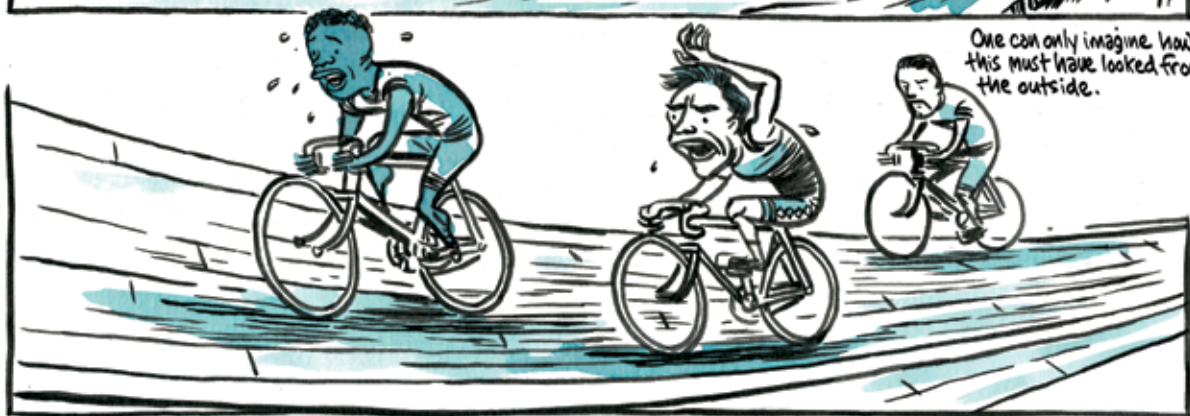
His focus lapsed and he suffered a crash with another rider.



Then there was the knife-wielding man...



Another rider complained of iron beams being thrown at him.



One can only imagine how this must have looked from the outside.

The crashes and collapses continued to mount.



The carnage on the track was matched by spectator hysteria. They threw flowers, money, and insults. Hats, praise, and probably bloomers rained down on the track.



Roosevelt's police force arrived to maintain order. Outside the arena, throngs of people stretching down the block waited to pay double the original admission.



A dense smog of days-old tobacco and cooking smoke hung in the air, mingling with sweat and desperation and coating everything in soot.

Race-leader Teddy Hale still rode strong. The rest were far worse for wear.

Teddy Hale Victorious

THE GREATEST BICYCLE RIDER IN HISTORY.

Hale racked up a staggering 1,910 miles, beating the previous record by 310 miles. Taylor, in 8th place with 1,732 miles, had also surpassed the previous record. He collected an additional \$125 for his troubles.



Back in Brooklyn, he slept like someone who had just ridden 1,700 miles in a week.

Deep, dreamless sleep

He would dream bigger when he returned home.



Worcester, 1897

Morning,
Major!

Good morning!

Taylor must have been quite a sight in the
the cold Winter months. Running wasn't a
popular pastime, especially in the snow.

He was committed to his cross-training regimen. Spring would
bring the racing season, and he wanted to be in top form.

There was speculation that
six-day endurance riding would
ruin his sprint.





This abuse followed him to every race. He was fouled, forced off the track or subjected to threats and abuse. All in the purportedly progressive Northeast.



Beyond his goal of success, outriding the competition was an effective tactic to stay out of Harris' way.

When he couldn't manage that he held back completely, making no attempt to win.



This didn't escape the notice of the fans or the press.

Taylor was a popular draw. Seeing him shut out so unfairly angered them.

"Major Taylor is a quiet and honest gentleman. He is better educated than the majority of the men who he meets in the professional ranks. He is deserving, at least, of fair



To some extent, this was a sign of the times. Jim Crow laws rolled back post-Civil War reforms. Plessy v. Ferguson, a railroad accommodations case, established separate but equal as law.

In Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love, Taylor was denied lodging before a race.



Fortunately he had friends in the business. One of them, racer Fred Schade, learned of his predicament and made arrangements for him.

I have a rented cottage in town where you can stay.

I don't know how I can ever repay you!

Ha! Just let me draft off you in one of the heats!



The audience treated him horribly at first, shouting insults, but his poise and performance won them over.

His adversaries, however, continued to insult and threaten him.

He carried on but admitted his worries to the press.

I have a profound dread of injury every time I race...

They have threatened to injure me, and I expect before the season is finished they will do so.

His perseverance in the face of this was astounding.

