Transcript of **Out of The Woofworks** Episode 6: “Airen (Perretologia)”

**RACHEL:** Welcome to Out Of The Woofworks, here with me, Rachel Forday, a podcast where we’ll be talking about dogs, dog training, and more importantly human social issues, both in the dog industry and the world.

Today we have Airen with us, who makes just the greatest and coolest art to do with dogs, animals, people, and science. In fact, he actually designed this podcast's cover art! He will be talking to us about dogs, cats, art, and even more crucially being a transperson and the worries that may come as part of that due to transphobia in our world, and of course, the dog world is not exempt.

I had a lot of fun speaking to Airen, so I hope you'll enjoy this episode too! Let's get right into it!

*[intro music]*

**RACHEL:** Hey, Airen. Thank you so much for chatting with us today. How are you doing?

**AIREN:** I'm great. Thank you for inviting me.

**RACHEL:** Oh yay. I'm really glad to have you here. Could you tell the people listening a little bit about yourself and what you do?

**AIREN:** Yeah, sure. My name is Airen. My pronouns are he/they, although I prefer people to default to "he" when speaking, you know, "he", sorry "they" is kind of a special occasion pronoun, like for weddings and such.

**RACHEL**: Yeah.

**AIREN:** And yeah, I studied biochemistry and then did a Master's degree in biotechnology. And then I said, "Fuck it. This is not for

me". So now I do art and science communication.

**RACHEL:**. That's amazing. I really love that you do that. And, obviously, you know, you post about your awesome dog Pili on your Instagram. And I love her and I love her teefies. But could you tell us more about your story with Pili and how you ended up with her?

**AIREN:** Yeah, Pili is currently eight. I adopted her when she was just 11 months old and I was just 17, which was a terrible idea. I should not have adopted a dog at that time, but yeah, life happens and yeah, I didn't get her from a really nice shelter honestly. They were really dishonest in the process. She had never been inside a house and she was almost a year old. It was a mess, but thankfully, you know, she pushed me to learn a lot about dogs and behavior just to kinda get a relationship to a better place. And now we're doing great, honestly.

**RACHEL:** Oh, that's really amazing. When she first came to you was she already like really cuddly or did she have some issues that you got worried about?

**AIREN:** She wasn't afraid of people, but she wasn't so into people as she is now, you know. She was like, "I don't really care about humans that much". And she was terrible with children. She wanted to play, I guess, and she got overexcited and she was super mouthy. And she was reactive and she destroyed furniture. She had never been inside a house, so she was fearful to go into a house. And then when she was inside, she was super destructive. She had no idea what a dog toy was and she didn't care. So yeah, she basically destroyed everything I hold sacred. *[Laughs]*

**RACHEL:** Awww *[laughs]*, all of your belongings.

**AIREN:** Yeah. Yeah, yeah. And she was really hard to manage too, because she was a young dog, super strong athletic, and she was really hard to just contain her destruction circle.

**RACHEL:** Yeah. I can imagine. That's really challenging, especially when you first got her so young as well.

And you also have a very handsome cat Darwin. So who came first? Was it Darwin or Pili? And did you need –

**AIREN**: Pili, Pili.

**RACHEL**: Pili came first. Did you need quite a bit of time to integrate them together or was it quite natural?

**AIREN:** Oh my God. Yeah. Yeah, because Darwin was also kind of an accident. I wasn't planning on getting a cat. In fact, I'm ashamed to say that I was one of those people that said they were not a cat person, but not because of fear or anything, which is valid, like a valid reason not to be. I was not a cat person because I had a really controlling mindset around animals. And I was like, no cats are too independent or whatever.

But Darwin, what happened was in the neighborhood that I was living in, this stray cat had a litter and some teenage kid took the kittens away. And then we tried to get the mum to accept the kittens back because that's the best thing to do, but it didn't work and two of them died. So I had to raise these little two tiny kittens and I wasn't planning on getting– and I was planning on getting them adopted, but I fell in love with this little cat so much that I had to keep him. And yes, it was super hard because Pili wanted to eat him. Like she definitely wanted to eat that cat.

**RACHEL:** Right. Oh no. And so that means you kind of hand reared Darwin, like.

**AIREN:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. He was literally just born. Like I got him when he was a day old. I had to cut his little– oh this is worse, but I had to get the little umbilical cord.

**RACHEL**: *[Gasp]* Oh my goodness. I didn't know you had to do all that.

**AIREN**: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I thought he was going to die really. Because what you read online, and it's true, that it's really hard to raise a cat from that age, because even when you get the proper milk and everything, they just need their mum.

It was so hard, and having a dog that, you know, Pili, she was a stray, so she probably had been eating rats and rabbits and probably cats too, honestly. And she was not happy with the situation.

But yeah, it was honestly easier than I might have expected because those first two weeks were hard, but then Pili sort of just got used to him.

**RACHEL:** Oh, okay, so was it quite natural? Did you have to have like a lot of things set up or do a lot of training, or?

**AIREN:** I had to do a lot of management, but not that much training. Like she just got used to him just by virtue of having a really strong management system in place. And she kind of got it by herself. I didn't have to do much training, honestly.

**RACHEL:** Yeah. They're quite close now as well aren't they.

**AIREN**: Yeah, yeah.

**RACHEL**: And I think that's why Darwin's like, your son *[laughs]* because you really raised him, I didn't know that.

**AIREN:** Yeah. He, he will come to me and he will ask me to sing to him. He literally, he won't to stop looking at me and pawing at me until I sing it to him. He's a dad's boy

**RACHEL:** Oh, I love him. I love cats. I probably say this in every episode where we talk about cats. I love cats.

**AIREN:** Cats are great. Honestly, cats are great. Cats have taught me a lot about how to be nice to dogs, actually.

**RACHEL:** That's really interesting. And that comes on to the next topic because obviously you live the force free life with Pili and Darwin, and they're so loved and happy. And I know it's hard sometimes with dog guardians finding out what to do with their dogs, because there is just so much information out there.

So how did you first get into knowing about force free or positive reinforcement based training?

**AIREN:** Can I ask you something first.

**RACHEL**: Yes, go on!

**AIREN**: Am I the first not dog trainer in here?

**RACHEL**: You might be. Yes.

**AIREN**: Oh my god, such an accomplishment. Am I also the first cross-dresser?

**RACHEL**: You might be. Yes.

**AIREN**: *[Laughs}* Great. I'm such an accomplished young man.

I had this, you know, education in place where I just did things with animals, the way things are done here in South Spain, you know.

**RACHEL**: Sure.

**AIREN**: I know this is a stereotypical answer. I'll try to be more interesting in the future, but Pili just kind of forced me to learn about dogs because she was not responding well. Like I know all dogs won't respond well to that. And fallout from the use of punishment happens in all dogs, but Pili, particularly, she was not having any of it.

**RACHEL**: Yep.

**AIREN**: And that kind of forced me to look for information online, which is a terrible idea. But I came across Emily Larlham's YouTube channel. I don't know how, but I was so lucky because I did not know a lot about using food to train tricks. It just never occurred to me that you could use food, you know, for anything really and play for anything and positive reinforcement. So that got me interested in the science of it.

So at that time I was in college for biochemistry, so I had already some notions of how to look for science and how to interpret it. So I got into behavior science and started reading about that. And then I joined the Instagram. So it was first YouTube, then the science and then Instagram.

**RACHEL:** Oh, wow, that's such a good journey to finding out. And I guess, like you say, having Darwin, having a cat also played a part in kind of understand consent with our dogs as well.

**AIREN:** Yeah, yeah. And you know at first, like Darwin is such a happy boy and he likes to, you know, go on walks and generally just do a lot of stuff with me. And at first I was like, oh, you know, I'm going to be that person walking a cat and the cat is just going to do whatever he wants to.

And that kind of taught me that "No, when I'm walking a dog, I also want the dog just going around and sniffing and doing whatever, you know". So having a cat has taught me to, you know, treat dogs a little bit more like cats because people respect cat a lot more, I think.

**RACHEL:** They really do. I don't know why, but there is this sort of disconnect where you might see someone use a shock collar on their dog or like a prong collar or whatever, when they're walking their dog. But then the cat is on a harness and just doing whatever they want, at the same time.

**AIREN:** Yeah, yeah. And it's like, you can do the same thing. You can do the same thing. I have fantastic news for you.

**RACHEL**: Yeah?

**AIREN**: You can treat dogs nicely too.

**RACHEL:** *[Laughs]* Yes, exactly. You can treat them as independent beings as well. That is really important.

So are you one of the few people in your area that you see using treats in your walks or in your training and things like that? Is it more punishment based in your area, or?

**AIREN:** Yeah, absolutely. Tools are not very common here. Like, you only ever see slip leads and then the occasional prong.

**RACHEL**: Okay.

**AIREN**: But tools are not really common, but there is such a strong punishment mentality around dogs. And so few people actually go around with treats and I haven't seen anyone using a long line, honestly. Maybe in the city I have, but not right now. I'm living in my hometown, and here, I think I'm the only person with the treat pouch and the long line. Which is sad, honestly.

**RACHEL:** Yeah. I mean, I hope that with more people see you out and about doing it, that maybe they'll think actually that seems to work and Pili such a good girl, and you know... *[laughs]*

**AIREN:** Yeah. When I take her to, you know, cafes and such, I love to bring her mat and everything. I sometimes leave her at home, but when I take her, I'm like, with a backpack with everything she needs. And people are so surprised that I will carry a backpack for things my dog needs. And I'm like, yeah, she's the queen of my life. Like I do stuff for her. We're friends. I don't know.

**RACHEL:** Exactly. I mean, that's what I try to do if I see someone walking in front of me or you know, behind me or whatever, with a dog on a prong or whatever, I just try and walk in front and just keep giving treats to Dave. *[laughs]*

**AIREN:** I know that feeling. I know that feeling. I don't know why it hasn't happened yet, but I would expect my dog to be happy about seeing dogs in prongs or something because she gets a ton of treats. She gets all the treats when a dog is not being treated very nicely.

**RACHEL:** Yeah, I know. But then it's sometimes it's the opposite, right?

**AIREN**: Yeah. It's the opposite.

**RACHEL**: Cause I remember you made a comic about this, where your main character dog looked quite worried at a dog that was wearing prong collars and shock collars.

**AIREN**: Ya, ya.

**RACHEL**: I love that thing because Dave, my dog, gets worried about stuff like that as well. And he gets particularly worried if the person also talks in a very stern voice to the dog like "SIT!" and you see his ears go back and he's got the whale eye and things like that. And so Pili's a bit like that as well?

**AIREN:** Yeah, Pili's like that. And sometimes she'll try to go to the person like, "Are you upset or something."

**RACHEL**: Aw...

**AIREN**: Pili is such a people dog, you know. And she's like intrigued and also a little bit scared and nervous... she doesn't like it. And I think it's– it has to do with the other dog's body language. Because a lot of times you see those dogs who are super tense and, you know, it makes our dogs also like tense, like, "
"What's happening?"

**RACHEL:** Yeah, exactly. They can definitely read a lot from the body language and be like, "Ooh, I'll just... no thank you."

**AIREN**: Yeah. *[Laughs]*

**RACHEL**: So, I mean, you make such great bright and colorful art and graphics and comics about some of the concepts in force free training or the lifestyle basically. And I think your work has been so helpful for spreading the word about how we can be kinder, more compassionate to our dogs, but also to people as well. So how long have you been making art for? I know you mentioned a little bit earlier, but like how did you get into it?

**AIREN:** Why thank you... for the compliments. Um, I started drawing, I think, super early on, but my relationship with art has had its ups and downs because I think I started really early just to process the world. Like I've always done drawings to like, understand things about the world and about myself.

But then when I was in primary school, this teacher hated everything I did. And she was very vocal about it. And I remember this time I drew a grasshopper and it was a nice grasshopper. These things stick to your mind. Uh, she said that grasshopper in particular, apparently she liked it. And she said, somehow I had cheated either by tracing it, which by the way, tracing is not cheating, or my older siblings had done it.

So I had a fucked up relationship with art from age six to about eleven when I kind of rediscovered it when I was a teenager, because when you're a teenager, you have a lot of stuff to work on, especially if you're queer. So I kind of rediscovered that. And from then on, I been doing art like, regularly. I just never saw it as a career before.

**RACHEL:** Of course now you do it professionally as well. I know you get commissions from dog trainers to do certain things, don't you.

**AIREN**: Yeah, that's so cool.

**RACHEL**: I love that. I love all your collaborations that you've done with people. But it just brought to mind how punishing your early experience about art was, but it's so amazing that you kind of found it again.

And I mean, I had an early punishing experience with music as well, and–

**AIREN**: Yeah, I remember.

**RACHEL**: Yeah, it took me a while to kind of get back into it and then do sound engineering as my whole degree for a while.

**AIREN:** Yeah. Right. Takes years. It can take years to actually get over it and sometimes I'm insecure and I remember that fucking grasshopper, like, *[laughs]* it's so weird, I don't know.

So something that happened to me is that I was good at science. And so I thought, okay, so I'm good at science, so I need to do science. And kids, word of advice: Just because you're good at something, doesn't mean you need to do that.

I thought that because I was with science and science is a career or not quote unquote "isn't", I had to do science. And now I do both things, honestly. I don't do science, but I do science communication and art.

**RACHEL:** Yeah. I think a lot of people have this idea that you're either or. You're either like a creative person, or you're like a science-y person, but you're both and people can be both.

**AIREN**: Absolutely.

**RACHEL**: So switching gears a bit because obviously I also want to get into even more on the human side of things here. How has it been for you coming out as a trans person using he/they pronouns, I suppose, particularly when it comes to people around you? Has that been a challenge?

**AIREN:** Sure, absolutely. I mean, I came out as bi earlier and coming out as trans is like a completely different experience, in my opinion. Like, um, people are usually so much better about sexuality stuff than they are about gender. Gender binarism is a fucking virus, honestly.

So yeah. Uh, it's hard. It's hard. And especially it's hard if you're like me. To the listeners, I'm this five feet tall, tiny guy. Still no mastectomy, so I have boobs, I don't have a beard, I'm not on T yet. So it's really hard when you are out and proud and you say, "No, this is who I am", but you don't look the way people want you to look. That's so hard. People get actually more violent at that. Once you have some cis passing, then you can kind of relax a bit.

**RACHEL:** Yeah. Are there like microaggressions or transphobic things you've heard people say towards you, if you don't mind sharing?

**AIREN:** Yeah, of course. I mean a lot of times just walking with Pili, I usually wear headphones, just not to hear the shit. But yeah, when you– I'm in a small town and you know, the teenagers here, especially the, you know, the cis straight guys that are teenagers, they're just assholes. And I hope they get better with age, but you know, there's always the comment or, you know, screaming, like "What are you? A boy or a girl?" You know, shit like that all the time.

**RACHEL:** Yeah. That sounds very uncomfortable

**AIREN**: Yeah, yeah.

**RACHEL**: Because he just outdoing your own thing, right? You're just out with your dog and you just have to experience the world seeing you as "other", basically.

**AIREN:** Yeah, and that's with a dog because when you go out without the dog, that's a thousand times worse. Especially because Pili is a big dog. And when I'm fostering too, when I'm wearing... wearing *[laughs]* I love that I said "wearing". No, when I'm walking with two dogs, that's heaven basically, because nobody says shit. But when I'm just with Pili or when I'm alone, that's when people really think that they can be assholes.

**RACHEL:** That's so odd and I mean, that's really horrible. Are there places or particular things that you're kind of more aware of, you try to avoid, things like that?

**AIREN:** Yeah. I try to avoid walking with Pili at night. I mean, I don't have a yard, so uh, Pili needs to get out for potty. And I try to avoid certain times of day, and I also try to avoid certain places because you just know, like, you just know if you– and also, you know, everything... just the way I move the way I talk, the way I dress. If I'm maybe sending a voice message, I avoid using pronouns because if I use "he" pronouns on myself, while I'm outside and people hear me, then that's guaranteed that something will happen.

You know, shit like that. It's like everything in my life, and everything in queer people's lives has to be, you know, so controlled. You need to be constantly aware of where you are and that's exhausting, really.

**RACHEL:** Yeah. You carry the identity with you. You can't separate that, right? You can't be like, "Well, now I'm just the person walking a dog", you are also a transperson walking the dog, it's all part of your life.

**AIREN**: Yeah, absolutely.

**RACHEL**: As a dog trainer myself, I wanted to know your perspective on this, you know, as a dog guardian and with the identity that you have... How can the dog training industry, or really the dog world, do better in supporting and working with LGBTQAI people?

**AIREN:** I'm not an expert on gender issues, you know, and queer issues. But I can answer these just from my personal perspective. I'd say there's three things that we need to do like now.

And number one will be acknowledging the issue because so many people refuse to acknowledge that there is a problem. And honestly, it's like so funny because it's everywhere. Like there's not a day– I can open Instagram right now and I can find you a queerphobic thing in two seconds. Yet, so many people are so focused on the dog side of things and they think like, okay, so this is the dog community so it has to be cute and everything needs to be nice. And it's like, no, there's people problems too.

And we as dog people who are, you know, like you said, the "other", we experience this on a daily basis. So we need to acknowledge the issue now. And I cannot believe that we are still on this phase of acknowledging the problem.

**RACHEL:** Yeah, we should be way past just acknowledging. We should be an action phase now, we hope.

**AIREN:** Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

And number two, I'd say it's getting better at identifying it because with queerphobia, what happens is that I think a lot of people think about queerphobia and they picture me on the street and two guys follow me and calling me a transvestite. And that's like, that's not my everyday life. That's once every two months, you know.

But I do experience queerphobia everyday of my life with those microaggressions, and they are so much worse. Like when someone follows me on the street and calls me names, I'm scared and I feel so bad, but that person ultimately is an asshole. I don't care about them.

But when an authority figure, especially in dog training is saying shit, that's what actually gets to me, you know. And casual queerphobia is everywhere and also dog whistles. So for those of you who don't know, dog whistles are when someone is saying something that doesn't sound whatever racist, queerphobic, whatever it is, but it can get to that topic. Like people know what it means.

So for example, with queerphobia in dog training, calling out owners "weak", and things like that, is usually a dog whistle for queerphobia and sexism.

**RACHEL:** Yeah, for sure. I think that's a really good point. There is a lot of queerphobia and sexism in dog training. Like just in the concepts within dog training as well, isn't it?

**AIREN:** Yeah and transphobia is literally everywhere. Like every time people see straight people talk about gender, they are casually being queerphobic. They're not aware of it, but it's still queerphobic. And when you, as a transperson, read it and read, you know that "you are a woman because you have a vagina", then you're like, "Okay, I guess...". So you have to go on with your day when an authority figure, you probably follow on Instagram is saying that, and you have to kind of like, "Okay, I cannot be the one to constantly call this out" because if that responsibility falls only on queer people, we cannot carry that weight because we are the ones experiencing that all the time.

**RACHEL:** It's on the people doing the harm to learn about it and kind of improve isn't it?

**AIREN**: Ya.

**RACHEL**: With learning about queerphobia, where do you think people can learn more about this sort of thing so that they can avoid and kind of, refrain from accidentally saying queerphobic things?

Because I know that at the same time, you know, it is in our conditioning. Like it is society all around that is queerphobic, and sometimes there are these unconscious biases or implicit biases that people have that they might not realize is queerphobic.

**AIREN:** I'd say– so it's not on queer people, the responsibility to educate you, but there are queer people out there online who are educating people for free.

So just don't try to take it for granted. Instead, just follow those people and listen to them because– and please for the love of God, if someone who says something is queerphobic and you're cis straight, just listen. Because it's so annoying when you have to be like, "And why? Why is that queerphobic? I don't... I don't mean it like that!" And I'm like, "I don't care how you mean it. I'm telling you. This is harmful because of this." So just try to be more open about it, like people should do when a person of color says something is racist, it's the same thing.

**RACHEL**: Yeah.

**AIREN**: Just listen to the voices of those marginalized communities.

**RACHEL:** Listen to them, and then acknowledged the harm and then learn better from that. I think that is so important. And that's something that the dog world needs to take away because I think sometimes people get really defensive and that is understandable sometimes, but it's really about thinking about the consequences for that other person like yourself, having to experience this all the time

and having to respond to this all the time. It's like you say, it's in your daily life and that can be really, really tiring.

**AIREN:** And honestly, I, as a queer person have my own biases too. Like I sometimes have transphobic thoughts, or biphobic thoughts, or whatever queerphobic thoughts in general, and I'm able to acknowledge them and just think, "Okay, I shouldn't be thinking this because of that." And then move on. So it's not a personal attack. It's really just so that you can do better and you can not harm those around you. And I mean, doesn't anyone want that? I mean, I guess some people don't...

**RACHEL:** Yeah, oh I know. And I think also, even in the dog world, because people do hide behind the dogs a little bit, that–

**AIREN**: Yeah, absolutely.

**RACHEL**: Because "I'm good to dogs, I'm kind to dogs. Therefore, I can't be a bad person", and that comes up a lot for sure.

**AIREN:** And that's the thing, no one is calling you or I guess, I think no one is calling you a bad person. Someone is saying, "Okay, this thing, this specific thing that you did is harmful because this", and you don't have to make a big deal about it.

Like, I think that cis straight people either react defensively or they over-apologize and it's like, oh my god, I don't need to hear you apologizing for mis-gender me for 20 minutes because those 20 minutes are going to be about me. You reminding me over and over again that you misgendered me. Just move on.

**RACHEL:** Yeah. That's sort of– It's to make themselves feel better, right? To just go "Oh sorry sorry sorry." But then. It comes across as if that was really hard, you know, like–

**AIREN**: Yeah, right.

**RACHEL**: Getting your pronouns right, getting your gender right, was really, really hard. "Oh, I'm so sorry. I'm trying so hard. It's so difficult." And you know, that makes it worse actually.

**AIREN:** Yeah. Yeah. That makes it so much worse. Just move on and change your behavior, or try to change your behavior. I actually told this to a relative who is doing so great by the way about my coming out, that she like, didn't know how to react when she got things wrong. And I said, "Just correct yourself and move on." That's what you need to do. Just correct yourself and move on. And when it's appropriate, you also need to apologize, but this wasn't the case.

**RACHEL:** Yeah, for sure. Just kind of apologize, move on, thank you for your time for educating them. Because I'm sure sometimes it's really tiring and you just move on and sweep past it, but–

**AIREN**: It's a full-time job.

**RACHEL**: It's a full-time job. *[Laughs]* I know...

**AIREN:** You know something? When you are a queer person, you are never truly alone because there will always be a cis straight person all up in your business, always.

**RACHEL:** [Laughs] Oh dear. It's so true. Have you been able to find a community in your area of like fellow LGBTQAI people? Is it mostly kind of online and kind of meeting people that way?

**AIREN:** I had the most queer and lovely and you know, it was amazing– A group of friends in the city that I lived in.

**RACHEL**: Yeah.

**AIREN**: I absolutely adored every one of them. They are goblins from hell. They– each of them is like, I don't know... I just love them so much. But since I moved to this town, this town doesn't really have that much of a queer community. I know some bi people in this town, which is nice. And I do know that there is a transgirl in this town, but she's so much younger than me and we don't know each other.

So right now my queer shenanigans are online.

**RACHEL**: Mm, okay. Yeah.

**AIREN**: And also when I'm feeling spicy and I go out with a cropped top, but that's, um, *[laughs]* that's once in a week.

**RACHEL:** You should wear whatever you want, cause you'll look amazing, I think.

**AIREN:** Yeah, I'm so hot honestly, but, uh, it's hard. It's hard to, you know, be brave about that.

**RACHEL:** For sure. I mean, there is your safety as well sometimes to worry about.

**AIREN**: Yeah.

**RACHEL**: I mean, here's the thing that people don't realize. It's having to consider, you know, what to wear, how you look like... to go, just go outside and like, do your shopping or walk your dog. And that is so tiring.

**AIREN:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. I remember you told me when the pandemic was on its highest, highest grotesque glory, you told me that you had to really watch when you go out and where did you go. That's... shitty.

**RACHEL:** Exactly and whether to wear a mask or not, because am I more Asian if I wear a mask or less Asian if I wear a mask? *[Laughs]* Because the people here were wearing– they were not wearing masks, but then if I wear a mask, I'm like the only Asian wearing a mask. And if I don't wear a mask, then I'm super Asian.

**AIREN**: Oh my god.

**RACHEL**: It's just like what to do. And it's horrible. That was... I mean, it's getting better now, but I still, you know, I still rather not go out like late at night, things like that, um, particularly if I'm alone.

**AIREN:** Yeah. I get that. I get that. And I also know that you in the first episode of this book I spoke about like for reactive dogs, for

example, a common recommendation is walk them at night and you know, some people can't do that.

**RACHEL**: Yeah.

**AIREN**: I can't do that. And not just because of the danger I'm putting myself in, also because I'm not going to be a good trainer or whatever to my dog, if I'm in that state of panic, literal panic.

**RACHEL:** Yeah, cause you're having to look around you.

**AIREN**: Yeah. You're in survival

**RACHEL**: Yeah you're in survival mode and not able to stay more aware about the dog as well, so I know that's really hard. That's a really good point.

And I think representation is like the bare minimum and it is important. And I find that that is lacking in the training industry as well. And I feel like, sometimes it can go wrong in the sense that either people are being tokenized. So like LGBTQ people being tokenized, or even more commonly, queerbaited, which for people who don't know, queerbaiting means implying or hinting at LGBTQ romances or attraction, but then never making it happen at all. So could you tell us where to find something that has great LGBTQAI+ representation?

**AIREN:** This question just gave me two years of life and moisturised my skin. Seriously. Um, I, let me– do you have a moment to talk about my lord and savior Taika Waititi?

**RACHEL**: Yeah, go on!

**AIREN**: *[Laughs]* You guys, you shouldn't even be listening to me. You should go right now to watch Our Flag Means Death. It's a great show because it completely subverts the expectations of queerbaiting, because you're expecting– it's a comedy show, so you are expecting everything to be, you know, queerbait-y, because it's a very queer show. So it's like, it's all going to be subtext, but it's not.

And it's amazing because it has so many people of color, so many queer relationships, queer displays of affection. It's so explicit and it's centered on queer joy instead of suffering. And also it's not patronizing, like there's a nonbinary character and it's not patronizing at all. There's not a speech where this character has to say, "Oh, well, I was born a girl, but then..." No, it's just pirates doing their thing. I don't know why you guys aren't watching this. I mean, I guess people are watching them because it has been the number one show for almost eight weeks.

**RACHEL**: That's amazing.

**AIREN**: And HBO is still not renewing it because they want the show to flop.

They wanted it to do badly and that's why they did no marketing, but obviously queer people said Taiki Waititi is in this, I'm putting it right up my ass. And that's what we did. So now they're gonna have to renew this shit.

**RACHEL:** I hope they do. Like you say, the queer representation in it is really good and it's not tokenizing. It's not sort of like, "Oh, we just have this one gay person or this one nonbinary person" and then their whole personality is about them being gay or nonbinary. It's like so much more than that. They are actual people in it, and I think that's what we mean by representation.

**AIREN:** The nonbinary person also bites people. That's nice. That's a character trait that you need to exploit. And also really common for nonbinary people. I know so many nonbinary people who bite, you know, folks.

**RACHEL**: *[Laughs]*

**AIREN**: It's true.

**RACHEL:** You are so funny. And I wanted to ask, obviously we talked about some, I guess really hard stuff today, some of the concerns that people in the LGBTQ community might have. But do you have any advice or encouragement or anything like that for other

LGBTQ people, young or old, ou know, just kind of learning about this stuff?

**AIREN:** Yeah, I guess I'd say always take your time. Don't try to force yourself into, you know, being this type of, or that type of queer person. Just take your time and know what you like and, you know, just do things that make you feel good about yourself. Don't worry so much about being the right kind of nonbinary person or the right kind of transperson.

Because I guess those stereotypes are not really queer stereotypes. They are cis straight stereotypes that cis straight people put on us. Like the thing where trans guys like me need to be masculine and all. I mean, I'm an example of that because I'm so butch as you see. *[Laughs]* But being queer means being out of that cis straight and, you know, gender binaries and norms.

So there is not one right way to be queer. That doesn't exist because being queer is defined as the other thing of that norm. I guess I'm just saying, just be yourself, which is cliche, but just, um, figure out what's good for you and do that honestly.

**RACHEL:** Yeah no, I think that's really good advice. And before I ask the last thing, do you have anything you want to add or anything that I've missed?

**AIREN:** No, honestly, I can't believe people are taking advice from someone who could pick whatever name they wanted to and chose Airen.

**RACHEL**: It's a good name.

**AIREN**: Well, you made it better. You told me it meant lover. And since then I'm like, so on board.

**RACHEL:** Yeah exactly. So for those listening... because, I mean, I speak Mandarin Chinese and Airen, um, in Chinese, if we wrote it out in sort of the English writing it's "Ai-Ren" (爱人), which is "lover". And I think that is amazing. *[Laughs]*

**AIREN:** I was a little bit– I'll confess this. I was a little bit tired of the name Airen, because it's a made up name. I made it up when I was actually a kid, which by the way– trans foreshadowing. I was like, wow, I, I'm not sure about this name. Uh, but then you told me that and I'm like, okay, I'm in. That's me.

**RACHEL:** That's you. It is you, it's you embodied.

**AIREN**: *[Laughs]* Yeah, yeah.

**RACHEL**: So finally, is there a way for people who want to know more about you and your work or commission, any art from you... uh, is there a way for them to get in touch with you?

**AIREN:** Yeah. Okay. My account name is in Spanish. It's Perretologia and I'm not going to spell it. It's a terrible name for a bilingual person. I'm sorry, but you can– probably, if you go to this podcast's show notes–

**RACHEL**: Yes!

**AIREN**: You know, you can find me there. And also if you look for "Airen", A-I-R-E-N. Oh my god, spelling in English is so difficult. If you look for that, I'm probably in it, because again, it's a weird name and yeah, you can just message me or click on the link in my bio where there's my email there and my Patreon page. Um, you know.

**RACHEL**: All of the good stuff.

**AIREN**: Just commission me, buy stuff from me and come to my house and I'll bake you a pie!

**RACHEL:** Awww, you're the best! *[Laughs]*

**AIREN**: I will!

**RACHEL**: Thank you so much Airen, for taking the time to be here with us. I really appreciate the insight you brought us today and you're incredibly talented and you're just an awesome person all

around. This was really fun. So thank you. I hope you get lots of commissions!

**AIREN:** Thank you. I hope so too. And thank you for inviting me. I had a blast. I always have a blast with you and I can't wait for next year Eurovision because we need to watch again!

**RACHEL:** Yeah we have to watch it again. *[Laughs]* Aw, thank you so much. I'll see you soon. Bye!

**AIREN:** Bye!

*[outro music]*

**RACHEL:** Thank you all so much for listening. As mentioned, you can find links on transcriptions in our show notes. If you can't find the link in the description, you can find them on my website, dogatheart.co.uk/podcasts. If you enjoyed the podcast and would like to support us in what we're doing, you can buy us a coffee at buymeacoffee.com/dogatheart.

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