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@briantruitt
USA TODAY**Source:** USA Today. 07/26/2016.**ISSN:** 0734-7456**Accession Number:** JOE415410535816**Database:** Academic Search Premier**'A Hero's journey' into the unknown****Plucky island girl and a reluctant demigod test their courage**

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Auli'i Cravalho hopes that fans of her adventurous teen in the animated Moana will call her a heroine rather than a Disney princess.

"She's got some serious guts," says the 15-year-old Hawaiian newcomer, who voices the title character. "She's really courageous and beautiful as well."

Whatever you consider her, Moana (pronounced "Mo-ah-na") sets sail on a truly epic voyage with trickster demigod Maui (voiced by Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson) in the film directed by Ron Clements and John Musker, the team behind The Little Mermaid and Aladdin. The movie's music is written by Hamilton creator Lin-Manuel Miranda.

Set 2,000 years ago in the South Pacific, Moana (in theaters Nov. 23) finds its brave lead wanting to hit the seas. Sailing is in her DNA, though her parents are split on her making any kind of trip. An imbalance between man and nature has put her people in peril, so Moana enlists the help of the more experienced but down-on-his-luck Maui to join her on a quest to save the island and deal with the occasional coconut monster or giant crab.

"They really affect each other a great deal, and Moana goes through a coming-of-age hero's journey," Clements says.

Musker reports that Cravalho was "totally fearless" as Moana, and she acknowledges that the animators put some of her own quirks into the character.

"I tend to talk a lot -- and talk quickly -- so there'll be a little bit of rambling in some scenes," Cravalho says. "And she touches her hair a lot, and I do that when I'm nervous."

Maui, a shape-shifting dude who's not sure he wants to get back in the superhero game, does need some persuading to come aboard Moana's raft. He has been marooned on an island for a millennium and has lost his mighty magical fish hook.

"He's sort of a walking billboard of his exploits," Musker says. "He's got all of his great feats tattooed on his body, and because we're doing animation, those tattoos can come to life and tell his stories."

Johnson says Maui is confident, boundlessly accomplished ("He discovered practically every natural resource we enjoy today") and is used to being the center of attention, but there's a satisfying duality to him.

"He's also extremely selfish and lives for only the most important person in his life: himself," Johnson says. "I've never played a character with this kind of personality and deep-down heartbreak."

Maui's character arc hits home in many ways for him, too, in that valuable lessons about bravery and perseverance can come from a youngster who still believes in hope and discovery.

"With all the characters I play, I'm usually the one galvanizing people around me to get better and get the job done," Johnson says. "So this relationship between Maui and Moana, where Moana is the one inspiring Maui to greatness, is such a beautiful and powerful journey."

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