The main character, who is officially named Wander although his name is never mentioned in game, comes to a place called the Forbidden Land to revive a girl named Mono. Mono has been sacrificed because she was believed to have a cursed destiny. In order to revive her, Wander makes a deal with sixteen beings collectively referred to as the Colossi. These beings have been sealed away in the Forbidden Land in exchange for their freedom. Wander must destroy the sixteen idols that contain Dormin to free them, but the idols cannot be destroyed by mortals. Wander must accomplish this with the help of his horse Agro and a special sword that shows him the location of the Colossi and their weak points.

Characters
- **Wander**, whom the player controls, is the main character in the story. He has come to the Forbidden Land to revive the girl Mono. His relationship with her is never explicitly stated, but it is reasonable to assume, based on what he is willing to do for her, that he loves her. It becomes clear that what he has done is considered a serious crime, so he is obviously willing to do whatever it takes to revive her. Many things about Wander are ambiguous, such as how he knows of the Forbidden Land and Dormin’s ability to revive the girl. It is possible to know that he was in love with the girl and that she has some horseback archery skill, so it is safe to assume he has some training as a warrior. His appearance deteriorates throughout the game as he defeats Colossi. He becomes paler and even begins to grow horns from his head.
- **Mono** is the girl who Wander is trying to revive. Wander states in the opening cutscene that Mono was sacrificed because she had a cursed destiny. Obviously Wander does not believe her death was justified, but nothing else is really known about how she died. Though it is clear that Wander loved her, there is no way to know if his feeling were reciprocated, since she and Wander never interact during the game. Her appearance changes as two changes as she becomes a terrible colossus herself, then the horse companion and plays an integral role in the defeat of several of the Colossi.
- **Dormin** is a godly being that has been broken into sixteen parts and sealed in the sixteen idols. He seems to be a multi-faceted god, much like the God of the Bible, but his exact nature is never explained. His physical appearance, at least in the end of the game, is terrifying, and Lord Emon’s distress at his freedom clearly indicates that there is something “Dormin” that all appears to be. Dormin seems to be, in a way, a god of some sort and something that the player discovers. Lord Emon, it seems, has put his soul into the game in order to do whatever it takes to revive Mono, and he seems to know a great deal about Dormin and the nature of his imprisonment, and has the power to seal him away again at the end of the game (or so it seems).

Breakdown
Shadow of the Colossus is essentially a love story. The player quickly discovers how much Wander has put at stake for Mono, things a person could only do for love. Certainly the love story in the traditional sense has been beaten into the ground by numerous types of media, but what sets Shadow of the Colossus apart is the way it develops characters based almost entirely on their archetypes and the way they interact in game. The game is also unique in the way it develops an implied back story in the players mind through gameplay.

The game begins with a cutscene that shows Wander bringing Mono’s body to the Forbidden Land. Before anything is said, there are some things that are obvious about this lonely hero. His loneliness is most prominent and striking feature. He is alone with his burden, with only his horse to accompany him. The land before him appears vast but empty, a lonely place for a traveler indeed. He is not, however, an aimless wanderer. The player does not know his purpose initially, but it is clear that his journey is deliberate and that he has decided to be alone. The player can also imply many things about the hero from his horse companion, Agro. The horse’s size is what stands out initially. That makes it obvious that this horse is used for battle. At Wander must have some sort of background as a warrior. The horse’s color may seem strange because black is usually associated with the protagonist of a story. But the black horse tells the player much more than that about Wander. It represents Wander’s feelings about the death of the girl he carries. It represents death, anger, mourning, perhaps even rebellion as the player discovers that Wander stole the sword he now uses. It creates a stark contrast with Wander’s own appearance, which is very much that of a traditional hero. He wears light clothing with a sword at his side, his face wrought with determination. When Dormin tells him he will lose his love forever, Wander does not react. Lord Emon, it seems, has put his soul into the game in order to do whatever it takes to revive Mono, and he seems to know a great deal about Dormin and the nature of his imprisonment, and has the power to seal him away again at the end of the game (or so it seems).

Over by: Adam Middleton
Christ figure and the Garden of Eden. The irony is that the situations seem to be quite the opposite of the stories from the Bible. Whereas Jesus’ resurrection meant salvation for his people, Mono’s resurrection awoke a terrible beast and caused fear and destruction. The garden also has a different feel than the garden of Eden. The Garden of Eden is always associated with the loss of innocence, whereas the Garden of Colossus, however, is very much a return to innocence. Wander is transformed from a terrifying demon into an innocent infant and taken from the Colossus. It is as if the player has won a complete victory, however, as the horns that Dormin grew remain.

Ultimately, Dormin’s character represents a new beginning. The nature of Dormin is a much more mysterious aspect of the story. He is a divine being to be sure. He has the power to bring the dead back to life and he is always been associated with gods in mythology. He is also portrayed as having multiple parts. When he speaks he speaks with multiple voices, both male and female, and this is his body. He is a fearsome being capable of destruction. When he is a infant he is a harmless being, however, and this makes the player question the wisdom of Wander’s actions. It seems as though he was sealed away for good reason. For a moment it even appears as if Mono will not even be revived at all, that Wander was just being used to free this being from his prison. Dormin is helpful throughout the game, giving the player hints on where to find the Colossi and how to defeat them, but his helpfulness is undoubtedly driven by his desire to be free. His divinity cannot be disputed, but whether he is a god or a demon is left to interpretation.

Emon’s appearance gives him away as a foil for Wander right away. While Wander rides a black horse and wears a tight colored tunic, Emon rides a white horse and wears a dark cloak and a mask. He is very much the opposite of Wander, riding with a group of companions instead of alone. He displays great power in sealing Dormin away again, implying that he is some sort of religious leader, and his religion seems to be all that he wants the outside world to see. The cloak and mask he wears symbolize the persona he puts on for the world and for his companions. He follows all the rules, ordering Wander to be killed with no remorse and sealing the temple off with no questions asked. He fits the stereotype of the pious religious leader well, driven by fear and devoid of compassion.

Game Rankings
The pending of the game is full of twists and uncertainty. First, Wander is killed by one of Emon’s men, then Dormin turns back as Dormin, and finally, when Dormin seals the temple, it turns back into himself. The whole time Mono appears to still be dead. It seems that Dormin has not kept his promise and that, as Emon said, Wander was just being used the whole time. All hope seems lost as Wander is sucked into the portal from which Dormin and Mono had died on the altar. It seems that the entire experience was all for nothing and the players heart is brought down to the lowest depths, only to be brought back up when Mono awakes, Agrib returns, and the baby Wander is found alive. It’s the kind of emotional swing that is rarely felt in a game because it requires a deep emotional connection that few games can achieve.

Strongest Element
The element of the game’s narrative that contributes most to the mythical tone of the story is the ambiguity. The player knows almost nothing of the situation when the game begins. They know nothing of the others in the world (not even his back) and they know nothing of the world he is trying to revive. The only thing that is clear is the objective, and that allows the story to unfold gradually. Myths often skim over or completely leave out some details because they were devised to achieve a purpose, usually to explain a phenomenon or teach a moral lesson. The details would merely serve to divert a listener’s attention from the story as a whole. Shadow of the Colossus has a very similar feel. The player’s limited knowledge also allows for a focused experience. The player is forced to pay attention to try to learn more about their character through the various environments they explore and the short cut scenes that occur when a Colossus is defeated.

Unsuccessful Element
If there was one thing in the game that might be considered unsuccessful, it would be the role of the Colossus in the story. They were fantastical and fearsome creatures, and their role in the gameplay was flawless, but it is difficult to see exactly how they fit into the story. No explanation is offered as to how the Colossi came to exist, what connection they have to the gods, or what the sword Wander wields has to do with them. Some closure on some of those points might make the story feel more complete, but perhaps the game’s creator wanted to leave it all up to the imagination.

Highlight
The ending of the game is full of twists and uncertainty. First, Wander is killed by one of Emon’s men, then Dormin turns back as Dormin, and finally, when Dormin seals the temple, it turns back into himself. The whole time Mono appears to still be dead. It seems that Dormin has not kept his promise and that, as Emon said, Wander was just being used the whole time. All hope seems lost as Wander is sucked into the portal from which Dormin and Mono had died on the altar. It seems that the entire experience was all for nothing and the players heart is brought down to the lowest depths, only to be brought back up when Mono awakes, Agrib returns, and the baby Wander is found alive. It’s the kind of emotional swing that is rarely felt in a game because it requires a deep emotional connection that few games can achieve.

Critical Reception
Shadow of the Colossus is generally accepted as one of the masterpieces of the PlayStation 2. The aggregators Game Rankings and Metacritic give it a score of ninety-two and ninety-one percent, respectively. It won numerous awards for game design, including “Best Character Design” and “Best Game Design” at the 2006 Game Developers Choice Awards, as well as “Best Artistic Design” in IGN’s Best of 2005 awards. Edge magazine, in a list of the 100 best video games, describes it as “a fiction of unquestionable triumph, of riveting emotional power, whose fundamental artistic qualities are completely fused with its interactivity.”

Lessons
- The player doesn’t need to know everything. A great deal of time could have been spent explaining the backstory to players, but the designers decided that it was not necessary.
- The subconscious mind can discern more than could ever be explained to the conscious mind, so too much explanation can sometimes serve to confuse the player.
- It is a mistake to try to make a game more immersive experience. The player spends a great deal of time traveling across the land searching for the next Colossus. They never meet a single minor enemy on their way. The only battle that is done is with the sixteenth Colossus, which is of course made for less action. It also keeps the focus on the story and the Four Mothers instead of requiring the player to constantly be on alert for enemies. It allows the player to take in their surroundings as they are instead of constantly looking for the next skirmish.
- Character can be developed just as well in game as they can during a cutscene. In particular, Wander and Dormin are developed very much through their interaction with each other, as well as the player’s
relationship with Agro. Dormin’s desire to be free is obvious from his enthusiasm in helping Wander defeat the Colossus, and Wander’s love for Mono is obvious in his steadfast determination to defeat the beasts. The loyalty that Agro shows to Wander can only be understood if the player experiences it themselves, and it makes the pain of Agro’s apparent death much more real. A player can emotionally connect during gameplay, perhaps even better than they possibly could otherwise.

**Summation**

Shadow of the Colossus does an amazing job of making an emotional connection with the player with very little storytelling. The connection is made through gameplay, and the creators did a wonderful job of minimizing the story by telling the player all they needed to know through symbolism and archetypes. It shows that a player does not need to be detached from a game’s story whenever a cutscene ends.