What's the deal with the london olympic mascots?

Remember when the Rorschach test-like logo for the 2012 London Olympics was released, and everyone said that it looked either vaguely dirty or like a distorted swastika? That minor controversy was nothing compared to the firestorm that has attended the release of the 2012 Olympic mascots. Named Wenlock and Mandeville, the two marshmallowy cyclopses have little in common with the mascots we're used to. Unlike the cuddly bears, otters, owls, and eagles of erstwhile Olympic games, these mascots are steely, aerodynamic, and futuristic. At first glance, it's impossible to tell what they're supposed to be—although we're informed by their creators that they're " drops of steel" with cameras for eyes. As if that weren't weird enough, the really strange thing about these mascots is that they're supposed to represent their home country while also appealing to children. Both assertions are a little odd.

What about drops of steel with cameras for eyes is supposed to represent the United Kingdom? Are the camera eyes supposed evoke the thousands of controversial security cameras that are said to keep every outdoor Londoner on camera at all times? If so, why call attention to this fact? According to the Olympic organizing committee, the mascots are based on extensive research into what types of characters appeal to children. The researchers supposedly found that children these days are much more comfortable with non-animal characters with a high-tech aesthetic. Also, the research showed that kids like characters with strong stories behind them, and that no amount of cuteness or cuddliness can make up for a nonexistent narrative. That's why the Olympic committee has given Wenlock and Mandeville Facebook pages

through which children can virtually interact with them and piece together a narrative.

The goal is to turn the characters from static mascots into virtual friends that kids identify with and want to know better. Even though these characters don't have much in the way of defining characteristics, kids are supposed to find them appealing. While all of this is interesting, it remains to be seen whether these efforts will be successful. Will kids really want to go online and interact extensively with these two figments of a marketing team's imagination? If so, will this enthusiasm translate into enthusiasm for the games themselves? And if the mascots don't succeed, will it be because high-tech mascots is an inherently bad idea, or will it be because these particular high-tech mascots just aren't very clever or appealing?