

Watching out for tension with the tinsel and turkey

Christmas is a time of peace and goodwill to all men... except those fighting for the TV remote or getting one up on the rest of their family as DICK LUMSDEN explains

According to a recent poll, children rate their fathers among their least favourite playmates – because we are just too competitive apparently.

They'd much rather play with their friends (obviously), their brothers and sisters, their mothers, even their grandparents, than play with their fathers.

This is clearly a smack in the mouth for the millions of Dads out there who will be eagerly watching their kids unwrap presents in three days time – just itching to get their hands on the latest must have computer game / racing car / interactive toy / construction kit and “help” them get started.

I'd like to say that I wasn't like that when my son was young... but of course I'd be lying. The lure of a Scalextric track, a box of Lego bricks or the challenge of an Airfix Spanish galleon were always too much for me to resist.

You would think that this competitiveness, or, as I prefer to think of it, misguided enthusiasm, would wane as the years roll by.

But no. This week we hear news of some new research form another bunch of American scientists (bless them) that the most competitive age of all are those of us in our mid 50s.

Over a period of years, they have measured the response to some simple maths tests by difference age groups – some done in isolation and some done when in a room with others, with prizes for the most successful. It seems that of all the age groups, when faced with competition, we 50-somethings are by far the most eager to succeed.

Oh dear... that doesn't augur well for Christmas Day activities in the Lumsden household.

Mrs L has already refused ever again to play Monopoly with me. While she always chooses the little dog and ambles around the board buying properties because she likes the colour, I obsessively charge round to Mayfair, Park Lane, Regent Street and Bond Street, and get planning permission for a few hotels before she knows what has hit her.

She invariably ends up bankrupt while I (apparently) sit there sneering at her misfortune (her words), cue icy atmosphere for the rest of the holiday.

And it's not just Monopoly. As soon as there is an element of



UNREAL: A family sitting nicely together by a roaring fire watching TV without fighting over the remote? Clearly this photo is a fake

Photo:
BANANASTOCK

while we shout triumphantly at winning another Trivial Pursuit cheese, or even guessing correctly at Charades.

It's no wonder that Christmas is one of the most stressful times of the year. Forget the spirit of goodwill and peace on Earth... when families gather round it is anything but relaxing.

According to yet another survey, it will take the average family until just 9.58 am on Christmas Day to have the first of numerous rows. That is apparently just enough time to get up, open some presents, scatter paper all over the house, have some chocolate, a first glass of booze (adults obviously) and then start sliding down the other side.

Apart from the perils of buying the wrong present, or trying to take over your children's toys; or forcing your wife into bankruptcy at Monopoly, there are other

intended) of Sky+ can ensure we have total agreement of what to watch on Christmas Day. There just isn't enough time to watch everything you've recorded anyway.

And then there is the Christmas dinner itself. With six or seven hungry mouths to feed who gets the drumsticks? If only some GM scientists could breed a turkey with four legs, think how much angst that would ease.

Falling asleep after dinner is my major sin. Just when there is a pile of clearing up to do, I'm more than likely to be found nodding off in a warm armchair, snoring contentedly while Mrs L fumes in the kitchen. Sometimes I just ask for trouble.

So is it any wonder, later in the afternoon, when the board games come up, that temperatures rise up and down the land.

The simmering resentment of

competitive nature, and those who are less than happy with the presents they have (or haven't) received.

It's a recipe for fireworks all right.

But I have a suggestion. There are still a couple of days left... perhaps we should all log on to Amazon and choose from the 830 (yes that's right, 830) books and DVDs dedicated to anger management, and slip one into our loved one's stocking on Sunday. Every little helps.

Happy Christmas!

Dick Lumsden is Managing Director of Owl Marketing Solutions, a specialist in marketing and advertising to older consumers.

If you have any views on this article, or are over 50 and would like to take part occasionally in some gentle