SPIKE: A DARK PLACE #1, just out from Dark Horse Comics, unleashes Joss Whedon’s breakout character into an exciting solo adventure. The brooding vampire with a soul finds himself looking aimlessly for any kind of fight. He will do just about anything to ignore the pain of a broken heart.

At the end of the recent BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER: SEASON NINE issues, Spike turned his back and parted ways with the love of his life. Desperately trying to forget about Buffy Summers, he now finds himself traveling into deep space. While drowning his sorrows in alcohol, Spike jokes about the Roger Waters song as he journeys to the dark side of the moon. No matter how hard he tries, there is always a constant reminder of Buffy.

Inside his steampunk spaceship, Spike sits in the captain’s chair, hiding in the darkness. Along for the ride are a race of oversized alien cockroaches, who claim Spike is their prophesized supreme leader. But do these extraterrestrials really want a leader who just mopes around, wallowing in his heartache? Just when the crew is questioning his motives, Spike has to stay sober enough to take on the space monsters, who are about to attack his ship.

With this vampire-in-space concept, author Victor Gischler (DEATH OF DRACULA) plays around with the established character, aiming for the comedic notes. Having gone from villain to anti-hero, Spike is fully developed with his own personality and character flaws. There is a lot

Gischler can do with this type of rogue protagonist: For instance, providing him with a supporting cast by giving the alien bugs more to do. The critters now have full conversations, instead of being relegated to the backgrounds as in the BUFFY comics.

The minor problem here is Spike talking nonstop about his feelings for Buffy, which takes up most of the first issue. Obviously, Gischler needs to express what the protagonist is going through, but the dialogue steers close to annoying. As Spike mumbles on and on about the girl that got away, he starts to actually sound whiny. Spike chose to leave Buffy because he did not want to be the dark place she runs to when things aren’t working; he should at least man up and accept the consequences of his decisions.

In his artwork, Paul Lee pays close attention to certain poses of James Marsters’ performances. In a medium shot, when Spike is smoking inside his spaceship, the panel looks quite similar to something seen from the BUFFY television series. Lee also brings out the quirky humor to Gischler’s storyline. In a single page and without any dialogue, Lee uses the body movements of the space monsters to tell readers what they are thinking. With just smiles and hand gestures, readers automatically know the monsters are planning to break into Spike’s spaceship.

Readers will be glued to the pages during the transitions of Cris Peter’s colors. When the alien bugs appear in the panel, they are all covered in different tones of green. The interiors of the spaceship appear old and rusted, as if the ship itself has taken a tumble over the years. To show that the alarms have sounded off, the panels are filtered in shades of red during Spike’s battle with the space monsters.

SPIKE: A DARK PLACE #1 is definitely a fun read for both new and old BUFFY fans. The amusing mix of comedy, sci-fi and horror will keep readers entertained, and though there are a few rough spots, it demonstrates that Spike can indeed carry his own title.